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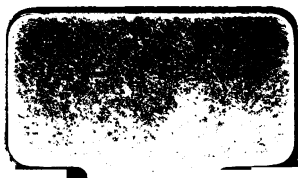
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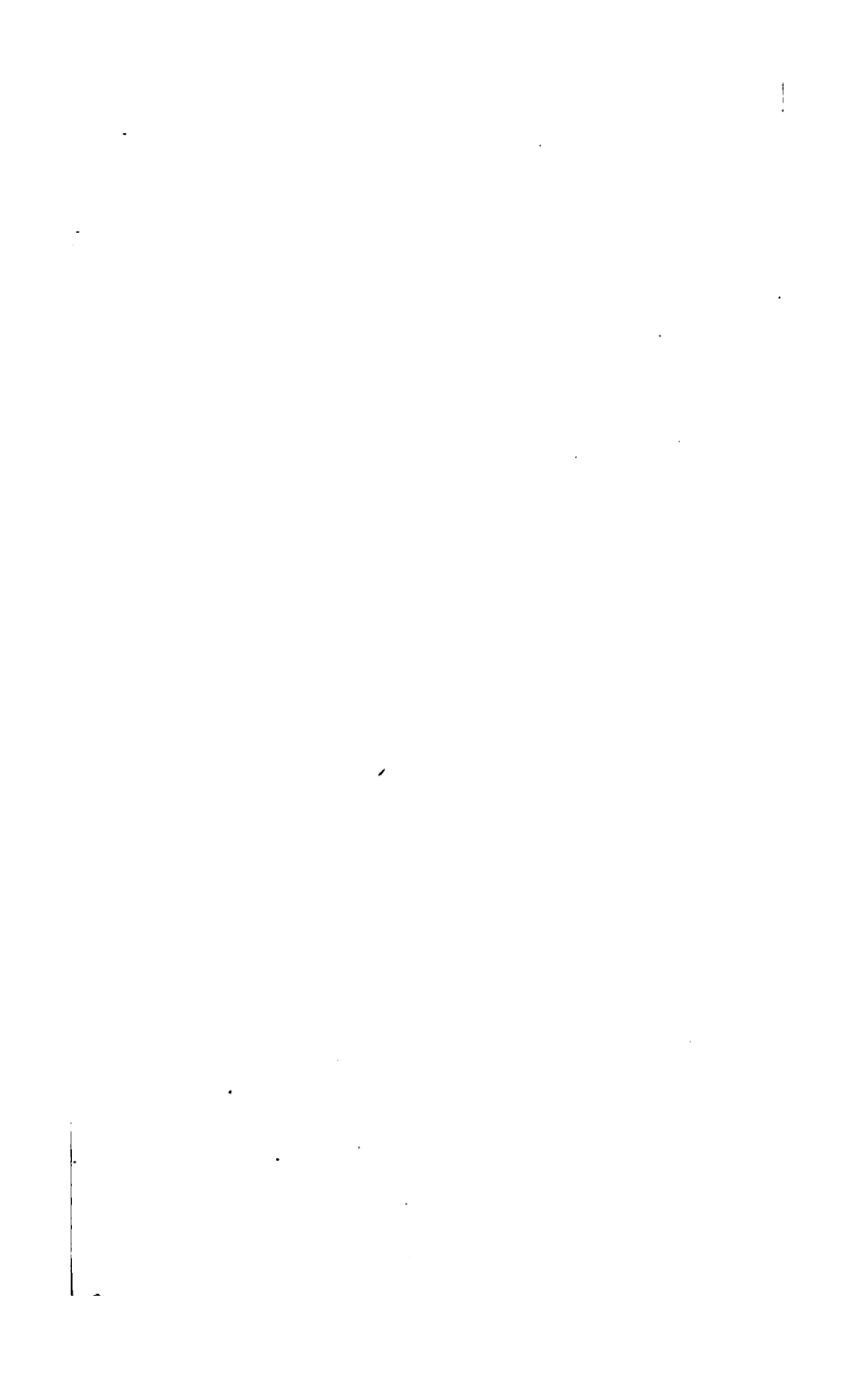


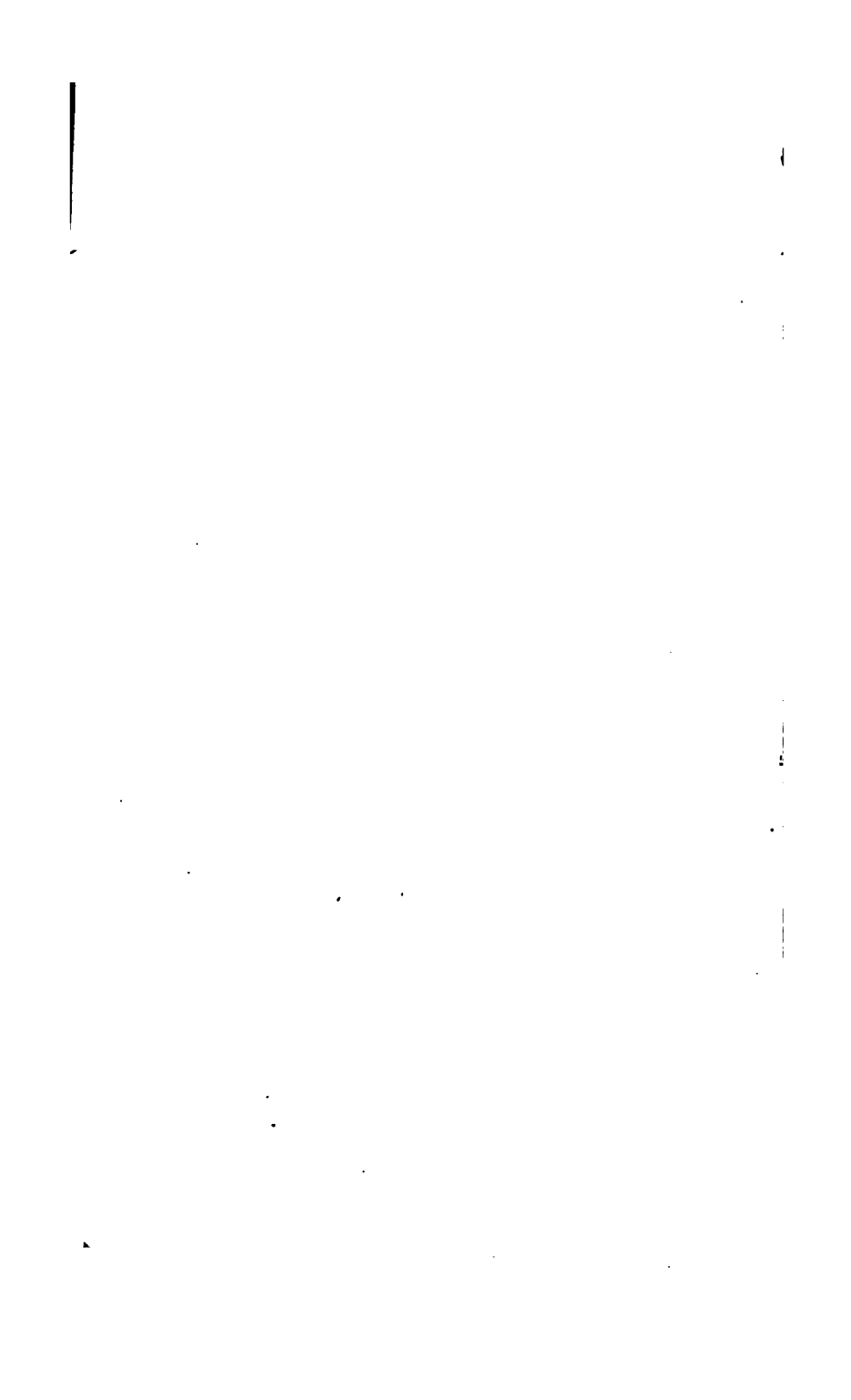
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PREFACE.

A DESIRE to promote the best interests of his fellow creatures, is the motive which has governed the life of the Author for more than thirty years: this motive originated the following essays, and impressed upon them their present character. They are sent into the world with the hope that they may prove serviceable to a class of persons with whom the writer has long been accustomed to sympathize, not only from the influence of christian principle, but also from a fellow feeling, arising from a lengthened personal experience in the school of affliction, commencing almost with the infancy of his being, and associating with it some of his dearest and tenderest connexions. Beyond this design he claims no merit, and expects no fame.

“In every book observe the writer’s aim,” is a rule by which criticism ought ever to be regulated. The design of the following pages, the Author persuades himself, has been rendered unquestionable; on this point he feels no misgivings; and he is satisfied that there is so much of candour and piety abroad, “that the design of the work,” to use the words of Bishop Patrick, “is sufficient to give it protection, if it cannot

gain it approbation. It hurts no body, and therefore may pass in safety ; and it offers its service to do every body good, which, methinks, should be taken kindly by those who stand in no need of it."

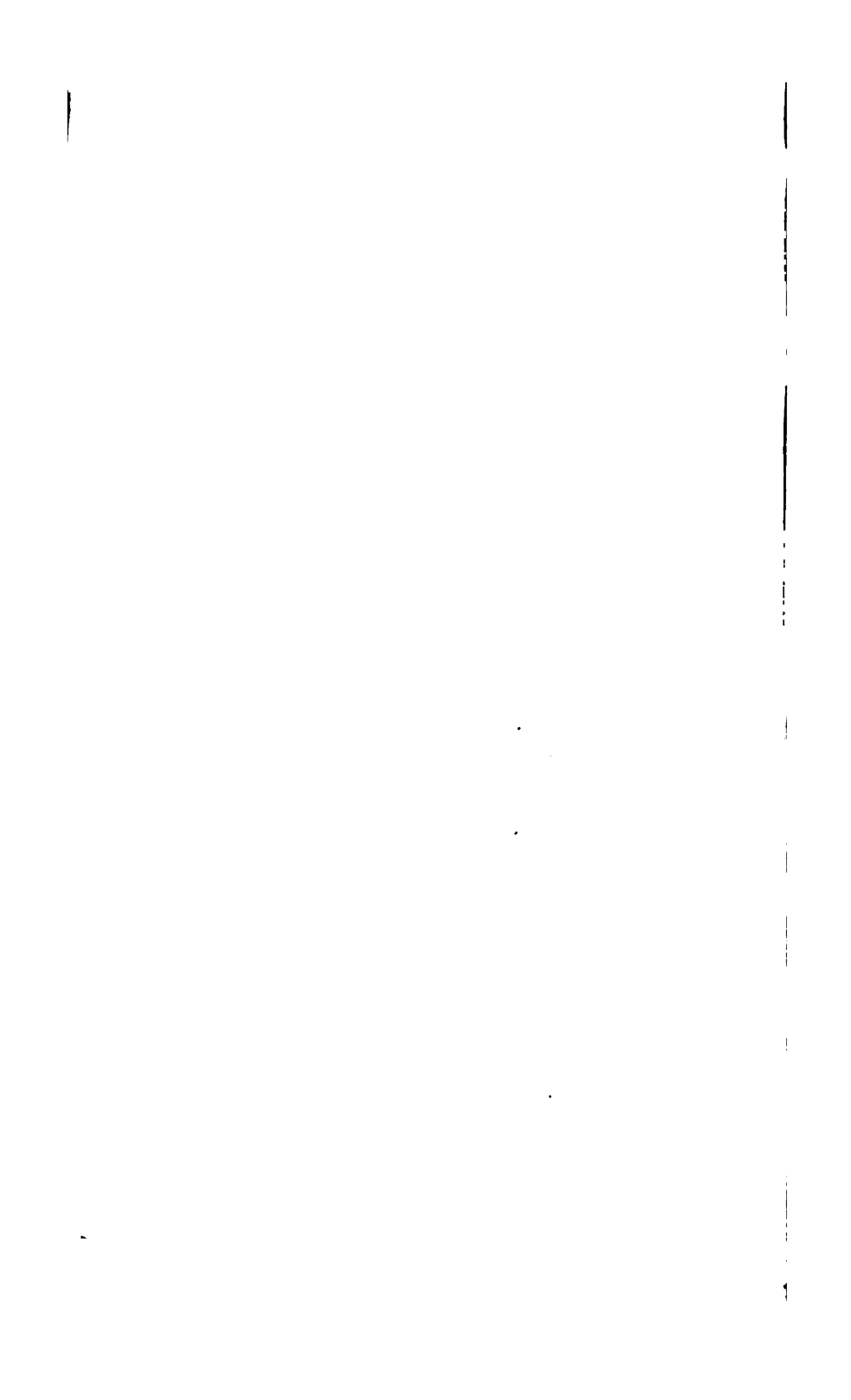
The writer is aware that a good intention is not always a sufficient apology for obtruding a book on the notice of the public ; and in the present instance it may perhaps be urged, that books on affliction are already numerous : it will be found, however, on examination, that of those by far the greater number are addressed exclusively to believers, and are confined to the purpose of consolation, whereas the majority of persons in trouble are devoid of religion ; and with respect to christians, they often require something besides comfort ; they need to have their minds stirred up by way of remembrance ; they need the word of exhortation, the counsels of wisdom, the cautions of experience, the reproofs of fidelity ; and these, too, must in many instances precede the administration of comfort. The Author has, therefore, endeavoured to adapt these essays to both classes, and, as far as he was able, to meet the varied experience of all who are in distress. Having written exclusively for their benefit, he has sought to avoid all polemical discussion, and the introduction of matters purely speculative, as being unsuited to the state of their minds, and the peculiarity of their circumstances.

Free use hath been made of such writers as have united their kind endeavours to assuage the burthen of

human woe ; in so doing the Author hoped to add to the value of the book, and to render it more interesting and serviceable. He prefers this general acknowledgment to a particular notation of each passage. The same reason hath led to the introduction of so many poetical extracts. These, he hopes, will be acceptable, not only on account of their general excellency, but because in that state of mind which often distinguishes the afflicted, a striking verse of poetry will frequently afford more effectual relief than the best selected argument.

The Author tenders his grateful acknowledgments to the numerous friends who have kindly patronised the undertaking, and but for whose spontaneous encouragement, it is probable, it would never have been brought to its present issue.

The manner in which the work has grown up under the hands of its author has been very far from favourable to any thing like critical completion. It has been written at sundry times, amidst a variety of engagements, and many painful exercises, and possesses but little claim to attention, except as addressing itself to the heart and experience of the afflicted. If these should find in it any thing either to edify or comfort ; if any should learn from it to support with patience the weight of calamity, and to look up under it with becoming resignation to the Father of mercies, it will readily be allowed that an end so desirable as this will render alike indifferent either the breath of applause, or the blast of censure.



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A PRAYER,

BY SYMON PATRICK, D. D., BISHOP OF ELY.

VOUCHSAFE, O LORD, TO EVERY ONE THAT SHALL
PERUSE THIS BOOK, THE ILLUMINATION OF THY HOLY
SPIRIT, TO UNDERSTAND THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE
FAITHFULLY DECLARED THEREIN, ACCORDING TO THY
MIND AND WILL : AND WORK IN ALL OUR HEARTS
MOST DEVOUT AFFECTIONS TO OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR,
FOR OUR INCREASE IN FAITH, AND LOVE, AND HOLY
OBE~~D~~EDIENCE. AMEN.

THE SOURCE OF AFFLICTION.

From the bless'd source of good
Could pain or death proceed? Could such foul ill
Fall from fair Mercy's hands? Far be the thought,
The impious thought! God never made a creature
But what was good. He made a living man:
The man of death was made by man himself.

The same rash hand

- That pluck'd in evil hour the fatal fruit,
Unbarr'd the gates of hell, and let loose sin,
And death, and all the family of pain,
To prey upon mankind.
-

"BY ONE MAN SIN ENTERED INTO THE WORLD, AND DEATH
BY SIN; AND SO DEATH PASSED UPON ALL MEN, FOR THAT
ALL HAVE SINNED."

ROMANS V., XII.

It is of primary importance that we should entertain correct views of the source of human misery. A mistake on this subject cannot exist without producing consequences highly injurious in their character. It will lead us either to impugn the character of God, as a benevolent being; or, to cherish dispositions inimical to confidence, submission, and patience. The true source of all misery is—SIN. This is the fruitful occasion of all the sorrows by which the world is agonised. To man, therefore, and not to his Maker, must its existence be ascribed. "God is love;"—this is the sum

of his moral character, the glory of his nature, and that which is the chief object of his own complacency. It is the essence of benevolence to love and produce happiness. Full of blessedness in himself, the earth was called into being by its great Author, that it might be a vehicle, or medium, for the circulation and diffusion of his own happiness; and had the original design of man's creation been realised, the world would have exhibited the glorious spectacle of a whole race, innocent, united, and happy, having one heart and one way;—a heart beating in unison with heaven, and diffusing with every pulse, life, and health, and joy, to the remotest members of the body. In conformity with this benevolent design, man was emphatically created after the image of God, “in righteousness and true holiness;” having in his nature no one stain of impurity, and no one trace of imperfection, to mar the dignity and grandeur with which he had been invested. All was light in his understanding:—it admitted truth without prejudice, and without any necessary error, except such as proceeded from mere ignorance. All was rectitude in his will:—it was an exact copy of the will of God, as the impression on the wax is of the seal by which it has been produced; and it invariably followed, as the needle doth the pole, the manifestations of duty which God revealed. All was harmony in his affections:—God's law was written on his heart, and his affections were so many ready servants, to execute what reason dictated and the will approved. Then the entire soul was the habitation of the Deity, and, as a faithful mirror, reflected the glory of the communicable perfections of its divine Creator; whilst the body, where yet unbridled appetite and lawless lust had found no place, yielded all its members “as instruments of righteousness unto God.” Such once was man. God could not but be pleased with the work of his own hands, for it was “very good;” and, as the present mark of his regard,

he "crowned him with glory and honour," bliss and immortality, and surrounded him with blessings of every kind. Nature within him, and nature without him, conspired to promote his enjoyment. Within, all was peaceful, serene, and happy. The soul, like the glassy surface of the ocean, unruffled by the gentlest breeze, had yet felt no tumult of contending corruptions; but, satisfied in itself, conscious of innocence, blessed with the unclouded manifestations of divine favor, and the most intimate and endeared communion with its Creator, it experienced ineffable delight, and constant overflowing joy. Without, all nature was formed to contribute to his happiness. But though the whole world was happy and beautiful, and had received the divine approbation and blessing, it was not throughout deemed a fit residence for its newly-formed master, but he was placed in Eden, in a garden planted by the Lord,—a fair, embalmed, and lovely spot, which had been enriched by the mercy and grace of Jehovah with every thing that could minister to delight and joy, and full of the shadows and similitudes of "a better country, that is, an heavenly." There he was surrounded by every thing that was "good for food and pleasant to the eye;"—encircled by ever-living beauty and magnificence: while in every object he contemplated, he saw reflected, in an endless diversity of forms, the beauty, greatness, and excellency of Jehovah. In this situation, removed far from fear and sorrow, disease and death, he was formed for endless improvement. His mind, like that of angels, was capable of continual expansion, refinement, and elevation; and his life, of perpetual exaltation in worth, usefulness, and honor; and had he continued in that state, he would have known no change, but from glory to glory,—from higher to still higher bliss.

For such high favors to be continued to his posterity, God might have demanded from him whatever marks of allegiance and fidelity he chose to impose; but herein how wonderful

was the divine goodness! he exacted no burdensome service; he gave him only one, easy, negative command, "not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil." From that he was to abstain, as a pledge of his subjection, and as an exercise of his obedience. Bliss and immortality were to be the reward of duty; misery and death the punishment of disobedience. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was the sanction of the divine law. How equitable, how gracious the terms! However men may be disposed to cavil, who would not have been content to rest the issue of life and death on such a test? Yet, astonishing to tell! the scriptures inform us, that man, through the suggestion of Satan, that fallen spirit, was seduced from his allegiance. His heart, beguiled by false reasoning, entertained unhallowed desires after forbidden knowledge. Yielding to the influence of discontent, and presumptuously aspiring to be like the Most High, he hearkened to the suggestions of the tempter: in a word, he violated the precept, and he incurred the penalty. God was just, and man was undone. He lost his uprightness, became subject to mortality, and, as the nervous original expresses it, "died the death." When Adam fell, all fell with him; then, as far as human help could go, our destiny was decided. Eden was lost, and heaven was lost;—not to him alone, but to the human race, who were involved in his success or ruin. Short is the dire description, but long and dreadfully felt the consequence. A thousand questions which a proud curiosity may ask, as to why, and how this was permitted, the Holy Ghost hath been pleased to leave unanswered. The fact is clearly revealed, and confirmed by incontrovertible evidence. Where revelation is express, implicit faith becomes our highest wisdom:—to object, and to reason, is to display the spirit of infidelity. There are some who have treated the subject with levity, and who have presumed to ask, how could one instance of disobedience, and so

small an act of disobedience too, produce such calamitous effects? In answer to the ignorant scepticism on which such an enquiry is founded, let it be observed, that the command of the Deity with regard to the forbidden fruit, must be viewed as connected with an important general design, and that the obedience rendered by man to that command was a kind of pledge with respect to all the relations existing between the creature and the Creator: so that as long as the commandment was obeyed, all those relations would be observed and maintained; and when it was broken, all those relations would be violated. Disobedience could not but produce, and disobedience did produce, those emotions and feelings which in their nature were thoroughly corrupt. These were, for instance, unbelief, ambition, sensuality, and ingratitude. Unbelief,—because by it man denied God's right to command, and questioned the wisdom and goodness of the test he had appointed. Ambition,—because he aspired to be as God, “knowing good and evil.” Sensuality,—because he wished to gratify mere animal appetite; he saw that “the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes.” Ingratitude,—because it was in opposition to the being to whom he was indebted for life, and happiness, and all things; and who had spread around him every enjoyment for his free and full participation. It is easy, therefore, to perceive, that the levity which has been alluded to ought to be condemned and repudiated with horror. Ought that transgression to be deemed light and insignificant which overthrew and betrayed every existing relationship between man and his Maker, and which hurled a foul insult against every attribute of the everlasting Godhead?

How fearful and calamitous was the change which sin produced in the nature and condition of man! When Adam sinned, he was banished into the wilderness of this world, and excluded from communion with his Maker, whose delights

were no longer continually with the sons of men, but who now left this earth *under a curse, which he had formerly blessed*. Even the image of God was defaced in man—that image which was the distinguishing glory and the supreme felicity of his nature; and he became the opposite of all that he originally was. Dark and enfeebled in his understanding in the things of God,—cold and lifeless in his affections,—corrupt and disorderly in his passions and appetites,—perverse and rebellious in his conduct; in a word, his whole moral frame was unhinged, disjointed, and broken. The proof of this soon became palpable and undeniable. It was seen in his ignorance, when he absurdly attempted to hide himself from the eye of omniscience among the trees of the garden:—in his aversion to God, otherwise he would never have fled from his Maker, but rather have basted, on the wings of desire, to the place of the divine manifestation:—in the disorderly passions which became predominant in his breast;—pride, for he refused to acknowledge his guilt;—ingratitude, for he obliquely upbraided his Creator with his gift, as though it had been a curse rather than a blessing,—“the woman whom thou gavest me;”—want of natural affection, for he endeavoured to exonerate himself from blame by impeaching the wife of his bosom. The female criminal acts the same unhumbled part; she neither takes shame to herself, nor gives glory to God, nor offers up a single petition for pardon. These disastrous results furnish us with the best key to open the meaning of the prohibitory sanction. They prove beyond any argument, that spiritual death, and all its consequences, were comprehended in the extent of the threatening. How is the gold become dim? how is the most fine gold changed? Who, beholding the fearful change, can reflect on man’s original beauty of holiness, and withhold the tear of sorrow? How art thou fallen, son of the morning? When Judah’s sons, escaped from the scene of their captivity, returned to Sion to

build again the temple of the Lord, the new foundation could only be laid by removing the splendid ruins of the desolated sanctuary; then came the remembrance of the former glories fresh upon their minds, and they wept aloud. And have not we cause for sorrow when we review the spiritual temple of the Most High laid desolate, and swept with the besom of destruction? The transgression of our first parent did not end with himself,—it was not merely personal; he communicated his changed and darkened nature to his descendants, who, no longer entering the world with the clear impress of the divine image, were born after the wretched likeness of their fallen progenitor. Therefore, when this fatal catastrophe had taken place, the sacred historian varies his style, and with a remarkable peculiarity, as well as propriety of speech, says, “Adam begat a son in his *own* [not in the divine] likeness.” The history of mankind, from the fall to the present time, has been in consequence, but the expansion and unfolding of the evil heart of unbelief—the principle of defection and rebellion in man. The transgression of our first parent has descended like an heir-loom to his posterity, entailing misery and corruption from one generation to another. The proofs in support of this statement are cogent and irrefragable. The scripture testimonies are almost innumerable; they form their evidence from every quarter; and constitute, not two or three, but a whole cloud of witnesses. From the moment this event happened, we perceive the posterity of Adam treated as sinners; they are placed on the remedial plan, and taught to expect salvation entirely from the interposition of unmerited favour. In every sacrificial institution,—in every scriptural definition of the nature of man,—but especially, in the ignominious sufferings of the Son of God, we are represented as guilty, and viewed as worthy of death. The testimonies of scripture on this subject cannot be too attentively considered. Let the mind rest on such

passages as the following, and ponder over the awful apostacy of our nature, so deep, and so much beyond the power of the creature to surmount. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." "All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." It is a solemn and affecting consideration, but one which must be thoroughly and distinctly stated, that whatever variety there may be in the human character,—whatever modification may perchance have been produced by science, by literature, by education, by example, or any mode of testimony or interest whatsoever,—yet this one fact remains invariably and unalterably the same, that man is every where a sinner. Yes, whether he dwell in the east, or the west, in the north, or the south, at the tropics, or the poles: whether he revel amidst scenes of luxury and refinement, or occupy the abodes of gross ignorance and barbarism: in every period of his history, in every variety of his condition, in every place of his dwelling, he bears the same stamp of moral degradation; he exhibits all the tokens of a fallen nature,—unbelief, ambition, sensuality, and ingratitude, with all their vile progeny of crimes; and exhibits them as having the uncontrolled empire of his heart.

All the circumstances of man's condition correspond with his moral debasement, and shew how greatly he has fallen

from his original state. We see the ground cursed for his sake, and bringing forth thorns and briers instead of the living fruits of paradise. We see man destined to labour for his bread, and to eat that bread in the sweat of his brow. Instead of standing at the head of this lower world as its heavenly appointed sovereign, he is become a drudge, a poor dependent creature ; and in the evils which betide and in those which threaten him daily, he is reduced far below the condition of the brutes. We see him enter the world the subject of weakness, helplessness, pain, disease, and death. The first cry he utters is that of suffering. In making the journey of life he is liable through all its stages to disappointment, vicissitude, bereavement, vexation, and sorrow. All nature seems combined to effect his destruction ; and innumerable evils, like inexorable foes, are perpetually tracking his steps through every course of life ; while death, always watching for his prey, descends when he is least aware, and seizes and bears away his victim. He then resigns his body to the earth from which it was taken, when it is devoured by worms, dissolved by corruption, and changed into its original dust. Such is the condition, and such the final destiny of man. In no situation of life may we promise ourselves exemption or security. The vale of life is indeed crowded with travellers, but none may make the journey of life exempt from disquietude or pain, or avoid that death which is exacted from all the sons and daughters of Adam as the proper penalty of sin. "Rich and poor shall go down to the grave, and worms alike shall cover them." "It is appointed unto all men once to die." Though the ages at which the allotment is suffered may vary, and the method also may be greatly diversified, yet amid the variety of modes and seasons, the path is one and the same. All these are but so many avenues leading down to the grave.

Who can contemplate these sad consequences of the original apostacy, and not exclaim, what a dreadful thing is sin?

and never should the evils which pervade our world be viewed by us but in connection with sin, the fatal source from which the whole proceeds. Sin, the invariable antecedent; misery, the invariable consequence! Sin, the cause; misery, the effect: the demerit of the one producing the desolation of the other. Child of mortality and of suffering! forget it not; approve it, and apply it. Ponder the solemn thought, that one sin hath introduced all the evils by which mankind is afflicted. Sin hath spread darkness, desolation, and misery, around our path! Sin gave existence to pain, and sickness, and death! Sin inflicts every pang! Sin nerves every death-throe! Sin weaves every shroud! Sin forms every coffin! Sin digs every grave! Sin writes every epitaph! Sin sculpts every monument! Sin feeds every sorrow! Yes, every tear which anguish has wrung from the eye, every sigh that has heaved the labouring bosom, every cry of lamentation, every pain which has invaded the peace of man, every bereavement which has snapped asunder the ties of nature and of friendship, and contracted the circle of his earthly joys, every disease which has consumed his strength, every storm which has beat down his possessions,—is the dire result of sin. The waste and havoc of centuries gone by, and the desolation of centuries yet to come, all reverberate in one awful sentence,—“These are the fruits, the consequences of sin.” Yet these are but its first fruits, the beginning of sorrows; the bitter consequences are not limited by the boundaries of mortality,—they extend to the eternal world; and if you would see sin in all the enormity of its character, and in all the tremendousness of its results, go in imagination to the brink of that fearful pit which the word of revelation hath disclosed to your view, where

The hopeless soul,
Bound to the bottom of the flaming pool,

Tho' loth, and ever loud blaspheming, owns
'Tis justly doom'd to pour eternal groans,
To talk to fiery tempests, and implore
The raging flame to give its fury o'er,
To writhe, to toss, to pant beneath its load,
And bear the weight of an offended God.

Contemplate from its margin the worm that dieth not—the fire prepared for the devil and his angels—the blackness of darkness—the smoke of torment that ascendeth up for ever and ever; and when you have contemplated well these direful objects, then say,—What was it gave to that worm its sting, but sin? What was it gave to that fire its intensity, but sin? What was it gave to that blackness its density and terror, but sin? What was it gave to that torment its bitter agony, but sin? What was it gave to woe's wide empire its dread existence, but sin? Methinks, as the inquiry is made, a shriek is heard from the bottom of the flaming abyss, crying, it was sin! it was sin!

O! did we but consider how God hates sin,—did we but attend to the present marks of his displeasure against it,—or could we be persuaded really to believe the “wrath to come,” we should no longer be disposed to treat it as a light thing. O! pray for the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, that the evil of its nature may be fully disclosed to your mind, and never be content with your view of sin until you see it in some degree as he sees it who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and in whose sight it is “the abominable thing” which he hateth.

How much ought we to admire the riches of that divine mercy which has provided a remedy against an evil so dreadful! The very same being against whom the transgressions of the human race have been directed, has himself been pleased to condescend in mercy to provide a method by which the guilty may be pardoned, sanctified, and saved. God hath not

left us, as he left the angels that sinned, in hopeless despair, but hath raised up a horn of salvation for us,—he hath appointed us another and a safer covenant-head, the second Adam, by whom we may escape from the dreadful ruin due to transgression under the first covenant. In conformity with this design, Jesus, the Son of God, was made flesh and dwelt among us; he took upon him the character and office of the second Adam. One was the destroyer;—the other was the restorer. The one sinned, and brought death upon his descendants;—the other was righteous, and suffered the penalty of sin, and gave his life for his spiritual posterity. In other words, he took upon him our nature, offered himself as a substitute for the guilty, and at length died the just for (or in place of) the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Because we deserved shame, he was loaded with infamy, and numbered with transgressors;—because we deserved death, he endured the pangs of dissolution in their most racking extremities;—because we were obnoxious to the curse of God, he became a curse for us. Glorious propitiation! by the substitution of Christ as our redeemer in our stead, and by the infliction of that punishment upon him which our sins had deserved, the law was magnified and made honourable;—and, the reasons for punishment having been removed, God's justice is satisfied; and now, "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses." He has declared his satisfaction with the work of the Redeemer, and, on the ground of that propitiation, he gives to every sinner free access to his throne. What a veil is hereby thrown over the deepest gloom! What an effectual door of hope is opened for sinners, even the vilest and worst! Let them but turn unto God with sincere humiliation, and sorrow for their past sins, and in the exercise of faith in Jesus,—a believing appropriation of his blessed sacrifice,—an acceptance of God's mercy, as displayed in the death of his Son, to the exclusion of all

human merit,—and their guilt shall pass away like the morning cloud; they shall obtain acceptance with God, and the gift of eternal life. Pain and sickness, bereavement and sorrow, they must still endure, but their afflictions shall no longer be punitive but corrective,—a wise and salutary discipline, promotive of their best and most important interests. Natural death they still must suffer; the flesh must become the food of worms, and remain the prisoner of the grave until the trumpet of the archangel shall be heard; but it shall rest in hope, and the immortal spirit, emancipated by death from a scene of suffering and of sorrow, shall be transmitted to higher regions, where the inhabitants, pure as God is pure, cast their crowns at his footstool, crying, “Alleluia! Alleluia! Lord God Almighty! who is, and was, and is to come:” where God himself is with them, and is their God,—where death has no more dominion,—and where a divine hand wipes away all tears from their eyes. Matchless mercy, that makes known to us the glad tidings of salvation! Glory shall be “to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will towards men.” “Sing, O heavens! and be joyful, O earth! and break forth into singing, O mountains! for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.”

THE DESIGN OF AFFLICTION.

O what am I, that I should dare arraign
Thy righteous dealings, Judge of all the earth?
A rebel and transgressor from my birth,
Conceiv'd in sin, the heir of wrath and pain,
What cause have I to murmur and complain,
When thou art pleas'd to smite? for had'st thou dealt
In righteous judgment, I had long since dwelt
In that abyss, where prayer itself, t' obtain
The slightest mitigation of my doom,
Were unavailing. Let me rather praise
Thy patience, that thou dost not yet consume
So vile a wretch : Oh no ! Thy word of grace
Assures me that the deepest wounds I feel
Are given in mercy,—not to slay,—but heal.

“ THOU SHALT CONSIDER IN THINE HEART, THAT AS A MAN
CHASTENETH HIS SON, SO THE LORD THY GOD CHASTENETH
THEE.”

DEUT. VII., V.

“ SHEW me wherefore thou contendest with me,” said Job, when in the bitterness of his heart he poured out prayer to God. The request proceeded from a conviction that his affliction was of God, and was intended to accomplish some important purpose, in connection with his spiritual condition. For want of such a conviction, many who are in trouble are not only prevented from profiting by their afflictions, but their distress is aggravated and increased, either by dwelling

exclusively upon the instruments, or subordinate means of their trouble, or by the perplexity and embarrassment in which they are involved, from their being unable to account for what they endure. But "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." "God is judge." With him is the number of our days, and to him we are ultimately to refer the variety of good or evil with which they are diversified. Disease is the messenger of his will. He appoints the "wearisome nights" and days of sickness. He directs "the terror by night," and "the arrow that flieth by day," and "the destruction that wasteth at noon:" and when any of these plagues approach our dwelling, they are commissioned by God. Are we deprived of those comforts which once gladdened our hearts in the house of our pilgrimage? It is the Lord that hath taken them away. Are we disappointed in our fondest hopes? Have we looked for good and behold evil hath come unto us? Have all our endeavours to succeed in life proved abortive? To what shall we ascribe the failure, but to the over-ruling providence of the Most High? "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." The sons of Jacob from envy sold their brother into slavery, yet Joseph says, it was not they, though they thought evil against him, but God, who meant it for good, "that he might save them alive by a great deliverance." Part of the affliction of Job was produced by the agency of men, and part by the more immediate agency of heaven. The Sabeans fell upon his oxen and his asses; the Chaldeans upon his camels, and carried them away, and slew his servants with the edge of the sword; while fire from heaven consumed his sheep, and a wind from the wilderness smote the house where his family was feasting, and buried them in its ruins: yet Job refers the calamities he sustained to the infliction of the same hand. He knew that his enemies could have no power against him, except it were

given them from above; and he ascribes the misfortunes which they had occasioned, as well as those which were more apparently and immediately the infliction of heaven, to the same over-ruling providence, which, through various intermediate yet subordinate agents, distributes unto men the portion of suffering they are appointed to undergo. "The Lord," he saith, "hath taken away." Such a reference of affliction to the will and appointment of heaven is indispensable to our deriving advantage from what we suffer. When we behold the curse as coming from God, the conclusion follows, that infinite wisdom must have an important end, and that this end, whether known or unknown, must be every way worthy of God; and a correspondent solicitude is experienced, to know wherefore he contends with us, and what he would have us do. Did not daily observation and experience teach us the contrary, we might suppose that they who are acquainted with divine truth, would be able to relieve themselves from all difficulty on this subject, by two plain considerations, with which they must be familiar; I mean the perfection of God, and the imperfection of man. These unfold to us the character and design of all our afflictions.

They explain to us *the character of our afflictions*. Our afflictions are not to be regarded as resulting from the careless or capricious exercise of Almighty power. To conceive of God as arbitrary or cruel, would be to regard him as unjust, than which nothing can be more base and unworthy. If a judge condemned a man to shew that he was a judge, or a king imprisoned a man to show that he was a king, every one would cry out against him; and shall we ascribe such conduct to the divine being? God forbid! The views which the bible presents of the character of God as an affectionate father, and the righteous moral governor of his intelligent creatures, and of our present state, as one of respite and trial, satisfactorily account both for the sufferings which men

endure, and for the unequal distribution of them. As God is to be regarded both as an affectionate father and a righteous judge, so affliction is presented in two lights in scripture, in each of which it is compatible with the most perfect benevolence in the divine mind. It is there represented as being partly penal and partly corrective, while in both it is declared to be the effect of sin. In neither case is it the spontaneous infliction of one who delights in suffering for its own sake, but the result of principles from which no wise father or judge will ever depart. A good father cannot correct us for his own pleasure, but only for our profit. Can God then intend the infliction for evil? Can HE take pleasure in our misery? Can HE punish merely to pain? Far be such a thought from our minds. An appeal to experience must in this case be decisive. Are you a father, and do you feel the tender yearnings of paternal affection? O say, then, did you ever take the rod into your hand from a pleasure you felt in tormenting your children? Did the smart it produced ever yield you gratification? Nay, did you not feel more pain than you actually inflicted? Yet you felt it to be imperative not to spare the rod. Infliction was not the result of arbitrary power, or of a deficiency of kindness, but the evidence, the expression of love. It was dictated by affection, and a concern for the welfare of your children. You discovered in them evils which required to be corrected; an eager pursuit of pernicious gratifications which it became necessary to repress, and to have connived at their indiscretions, to have neglected the proper exercise of discipline, would have been as ruinous to their interests as dishonourable to your own character. Chastisement is not less the effect of God's parental love; and the conclusion is so much the more decisive inasmuch as the fathers of our flesh are sinful, whereas God is absolutely and infinitely perfect. With him there are none of the mistakes or infirmities incident to human nature. He knows the exact

measure of discipline of which we stand in need ; he knows the proper time of applying it ; and the perfection of his nature exempts him from all suspicion of cruelty or caprice. He afflicts not willingly, but only when needs be, and invariably for our profit. The discipline by which the ends of his moral government are accomplished is not less in accordance with perfect benevolence. Conceiving of him as the moral governor and judge of mankind, we cannot fail to understand that he must put a difference between the righteous and the wicked ;—that the holiness and justice which are essential attributes of his nature, cannot allow him to pass by the violation of his laws, or be indifferent to an evil which not only subverts his designs, but destroys the welfare of his creatures ;—that acts of disobedience must necessarily be followed by corresponding marks of his displeasure ;—that his administration may require the sanction of punishment, and that the perfection of his character may thus become the very strongest reason for the infliction of suffering, where his law has been dishonored and his authority contemned. Yet in none of his dispensations, however painful, does he take pleasure in inflicting unnecessary suffering, or in making his creatures unhappy. Take a parallel case as an illustration :—conceive of a man distinguished by the utmost amiability and benevolence of disposition, invested with the office of a magistrate or judge, and called upon to sit in judgment over the liberty or life of another ; and can you not suppose that while every feeling within inclines him to the side of mercy, and induces a tender solicitude for his reformation and happiness, he may, notwithstanding, cherish such an abhorrence of evil, and such an undeviating regard for the happiness and well-being of society, as to consign the prisoner to a dungeon, or the gallows ; and that too with the perfect conviction that it was right and good so to do ? while still every sentiment of his heart, if it could be disclosed, would bear witness that he

afflicted not willingly, but as the result of principles from which he felt it impossible to depart. Such a judge is God ; and the sufferings which he inflicts, whether they be viewed as corrective or penal, are compatible with the loftiest benevolence in the divine mind.

Further, men are not only represented in scripture as the subjects of a moral government, but as subjects placed in a state of probation and trial, under a remedial system,—a scheme of redeeming mercy. The whole is therefore necessarily restorative. Herein it differs from the dispensation established in paradise. While man retained his original innocence, providence was a simple continuance of unmingled blessings. There was no sin, and there could be no suffering. Earth had then received no wound,—had suffered no blight, and when man, by yielding to temptation, became subject to the fearful penalty of the law he had violated, the economy under which he was placed admitted of no alternative, afforded no mercy to offenders, but imperatively required the execution of the sentence, which was eternal death. The sufferings, therefore, which followed the introduction of sin were but the harbingers, the pledges, of still greater suffering in the world to come. But by the wondrous scheme of redemption, man is now placed under a new economy,—an economy of grace, the result of pure and comprehensive benevolence. This state, though one of acknowledged guilt and depravity, is yet one of delayed punishment, in order to his probation and trial for an everlasting destiny hereafter. Sentence has been passed against him as guilty, but the sentence has for a time been suspended, in order to the application of means on the part of God for his recovery. To the great moral ends of this economy the discipline of affliction is in many respects needful, and hence the varied sorrows with which God has seen fit to visit us. Evils are now to be watched and provided for, to be repelled or ameliorated. Man's depravity must be re-

strained, and often punished. His thoughtlessness must be roused; and those religious considerations which he would uniformly shun with disgust, must frequently be forced upon him as salutary and necessary. Thus the purpose of God to redeem and save man is made the basis of his present providential administration. The great truth now made prominent is, that God "will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." This is his aim in all his dispensations. If he keep you in a low and impoverished condition;—if he remove lover and friend far from you;—if he make you to possess months of vanity and weariness; whatever you may be tempted to think of all this, his object is the advancement of your true welfare. Whatever, therefore, may be the nature of your affliction, you may be assured this is the end proposed. If this end be not attained, the failure must be ascribed to yourself. It is *you* who have frustrated the kind purpose of your heavenly father towards you. In the form prescribed by the Established Church for the visitation of the sick, the author and the design of sickness are stated with great propriety, and the passage is no less applicable to affliction of whatever kind. "Dearly beloved, know thou that Almighty God is the author of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore, whatsoever be your sickness, know you certainly, that it is God's visitation. And for what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you, whether it be,—1st, to try your patience for the example of others, and that your faith may be found in the day of the Lord, laudable, glorious, and honourable, to the increase of your endless felicity; or else, if it be sent—2ndly, to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly father;—know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, trusting in God's mercy, for his dear Son, Jesus Christ's

sake, and render up to him humble thanks for his fatherly visitation, submitting yourself wholly to his will; it shall turn out to your profit, and help you forward in the right way to life everlasting."

The design of affliction comprehends a variety of objects, varying according to the nature of our spiritual condition, and the peculiarity of our circumstances. Afflictions are intended—

To turn us from our iniquities. Sin is an evil incomparably worse in its nature, and more terrible in its consequences, than any temporal affliction with which we can be visited. It defiles our nature, subjects us to the condemnation of the divine law, separates us from God, and renders us liable to eternal misery. Now the chastisements we endure are medicinal applications for the cure of sin; under this view the mercy in which they originate is most apparent. The conversion of the sinner is often effected in this way. Such is the infatuation of men, that they are seldom convinced of the evil of sin by the law of God, until they are made to feel its bitter effects. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." The instructions of the rod are more impressive than those of the word; they render us more attentive to God's voice, and more disposed to serious consideration. In the full tide of health and worldly prosperity, men are too often forgetful of spiritual things, and inattentive to the condition of their souls. The bustle and anxiety of business, the excitation of passion, and the intoxicating influence of pleasure, drown the voice of God and of conscience, and cause men to walk on heedlessly "after the imagination of their own heart:" but when affliction comes upon them, the wandering mind is called home, reflection is

forced upon the sinner ; conscience, which before had seldom occasioned disturbance, is aroused from its lethargy, and exerts a power which causes the sinner to tremble. It brings his past sins to remembrance, and sets them in order before his eyes, and inspires him with fear and dread in the view of their number, their aggravation, and their consequences. It is the observation of Elihu, "if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction ; then he shewed them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity." In numberless instances the most painful dispensations have been made the happy means of directing the wandering steps of men from the labyrinth of sin and death, into the path of wisdom, purity, and eternal life. How many have, with gratitude, adopted the language of the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word." The Athenian said, "I should have been lost, if I had not been lost ;" and numbers may apply the same remark to their spiritual condition. Where did Manasseh find his father's God, but in affliction ? He was the son of good Hezekiah, but every pious principle of his education had been corrupted by power, wealth, and pleasure ; he became proverbial for wickedness, and would have gone on till he had filled up the measure of his iniquity, but God hedged up his way with thorns. "When he was in affliction, he sought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his father, and prayed unto him ; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem unto his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." What made the prodigal think of home, but famine ? In the days of his prosperity he was vain, ungrateful, and rebellious ; but when he began to be in want, then he came to himself, and said, "I will arise

and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Sinners will not believe the evil of sin until, by painful experience, they are convinced of the evil they have done by the evil they suffer. Affliction bows down the stubborn heart, and makes it humble and relenting. Even Pharaoh, who, in his prosperity, presumptuously demanded, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" became an humble suppliant in the time of his distress; "and Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord, that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail." We often feel for those who have been reduced and afflicted. But if in their prosperity they forgot God that made them, and lightly esteemed the rock of their salvation; and in their adversity have been induced to cast away their sins, and to cry, "surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more;" then these are the best days they ever saw, and they will draw forth their praises for ever. This, my suffering friend, may be your case, and will be, if you flee from your sins unto God, and commit your cause into his hand; then shall you experimentally acknowledge, "I know in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me."

Affliction is sent *to prevent evil*. "I withheld thee from sinning against me;" so said God to Abimelech, king of Gerar, when he went to take Sarah, Abraham's wife. But it will truly apply to every individual of the human race, though not in the same circumstances. Some men have gone great lengths in iniquity, and have furnished fearful specimens of the depravity of human nature; yet, even these would have been much worse, but for the restraints put upon them by the

Almighty. The vilest characters that ever lived would have gone to much greater lengths of wickedness had they not been checked and hindered. You perhaps have not sinned as some others, but you know not how much you owe to God for the restraints of his hand. It is likely you would have resembled some of those whom you condemn, had you been placed in the same circumstances, and exposed to the same excitements. The case of Hazael is a striking one: in private life he abhorred the thought of inhumanity. When the man of God viewed him with tears, and predicted the cruelties of his future reign, he was filled with horror, and exclaimed, "is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" "Yet," as Matthew Henry remarks, "after all, the dog did it." He went forward, arrived at the foot of the throne, exchanged the man for the tyrant, and became the very monster which he had execrated. The affliction you are now suffering may be designed to prevent as well as to recover—to render transgression more difficult—to fence in your path, that you may be preserved from going farther astray—to put a check upon the depravity of your nature, which might otherwise involve you in some heinous transgression. In such a case, the affliction is most wise and merciful. "Therefore," says God, "behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths; and she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now." The metaphor is taken from a husbandman, who, to keep his cattle in the pasture, and prevent their going astray, fences them in; and the sharper the hedge, the better. Thus God resolves to make our roving difficult. If we will go astray, we must smart for it. If lighter afflictions avail not, he will employ heavier. If we be sufficiently rebellious and perverse to break through thorns,

and to go on, though wounded and bleeding, he will employ stones as well as brambles ;—he will make a wall around us : he will present insuperable difficulties, and effectually stop us in all the ardour of our schemes and enterprises.

This view of the subject is deeply interesting to the christian as well as the sinner : and the due consideration of it will prevent much distress and perplexity of mind. It not unfrequently occurs that such an one, when visited with calamity, finds himself unable to discover any particular reason for its infliction. Though it is true he always sees in his general conduct unworthiness and imperfection sufficient to render him vulnerable to trouble ; yet he cannot charge himself with having wilfully transgressed the word of the Lord. “ I have endeavoured,” he says, “ to examine and prove myself by the balance of the sanctuary, still, after the most scrupulous investigation, I cannot discover any sin which I have designedly indulged, or any duty which I have knowingly omitted, or any idol which I have set up in opposition to God. In all my ways I have been endeavouring to observe the apostolic rule, ‘ whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.’ ” But he who formed the heart, knoweth the secrets of the heart. He sees the future in the present—the effect in the cause. He knows how much our character is formed and unfolded by circumstances—how prone we are to change with events—how the friction of certain objects quickens dormant corruption, and excites to transgression. When, therefore, he sees us in danger—when our situation is becoming pregnant with temptation—when our principles are likely to yield to the excitation of surrounding circumstances, he mercifully interposes to save us from the threatening evil. By removing an ensnaring object—by placing us in new circumstances—by disappointing some favourite scheme—by embittering some special enjoyment—by breaking in upon some connexion, he prevents the evil

which he foresees, and thereby preserves us from danger. Ah, christian ! you see not the pit-fall, but God sees it, and is not the blow which causes you to start back, and enter another path, an act of kindness ? You were not vain and worldly, but God saw that you were unable to resist a continued tide of prosperity,—that it would flatter you into self-importance,—attach you too much to earth, and become a barrier between you and things eternal ; and therefore he has visited you with losses and disappointments ;—he has caused this scheme to fail, and that purpose to miscarry, and the mean which you were employing to promote your elevation, to become the occasion of your downfall. You had not worshipped the creature, but the growing fondness would soon have induced an idolatrous attachment, and have divided your heart with him, had he not taken away the desire of your eyes at a stroke. You had not been drawn aside from duty, but your situation was one that brought you into perpetual collision with circumstances and objects advantageous to your temporal interests, but inimical to your spirituality, and therefore he forced you out of it ; and perhaps employed the treachery of a false friend, or the malice of an enemy for the purpose. O ! how much evil has God often prevented by his restraining providence, and how great in consequence are our obligations to his mercy. It is proverbially said, and the truth of the sentiment has secured for it general sanction, “ that prevention is better than cure.” The remark applies especially to our moral failures. The consequences of transgression are often irreparable ; the sin may be repented of, and forgiven, but the effects remain and follow us to the grave. Take David as an example. He fell by transgression, and was reclaimed, and restored to divine favour ; but his sin still followed him. In the death of his child,—in the sword which never departed from his house,—in the scandal which his conduct reflected upon religion,—in the jeers and scoffs of the ungodly,—in

the dreadful eclipse which his reputation sustained,—in the remorse and anguish he experienced,—in the blot and dishonour which will rest upon his character to the end of time, we see the bitter effects of transgression. View in contrast the case of Joseph: he was assailed by the same temptation, and preserved: thus he was not only saved from the guilt and consequences of sin, but he was rendered eminently useful as an example; he retained his peace of mind, and an halo of glory was thrown around his character, which will render it an object of pleasing and useful contemplation so long as human nature shall need an incentive to purity and obedience. We know not how much we owe to God for our preservation from evil, nor can we know while we are in this world; but we may surely know sufficient to make us not only submissive, but thankful. Where is the christian, who, in looking back upon his past life, may not trace out many instances of God's gracious interference for the prevention of evil? "Ah," said David, when he had been hindered from effecting a purpose of revenge, "blessed be the Lord God of Israel which sent thee this day to meet me; and blessed be thy advice; and blessed be thou which hast kept me this day from avenging myself with my own hand." Who is not under obligation to God for the same preventing grace? One ought to say, "blessed be God for that affliction, which compelled me to relinquish a situation I deemed so advantageous; but in which I now see, I should have fallen into divers temptations and a snare, by which I might have been drowned in destruction and perdition." Another ought to say, "blessed be God for that assault of calumny; I was in danger of rising too high in my own esteem,—of attaching too much importance to human opinion,—of regarding the praises of men more than the approbation of God; but by being abased and laid low, I have been brought down from the pinnacle from which I might have fallen and perished, and placed in a situation of

safety." Another ought to say, "blessed be God for that loss in trade; but for that I should have become eager, and grasping, and speculating,—I should have made haste to be rich; but that gave me a timely check, it turned my hope upward; and now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee." To these interpositions of God's providence, we all owe much of the innocency, and in some respects, the blamelessness of our lives; to this it is to be ascribed that we have not been a scandal to the gospel,—a shame to the good,—a stumbling-block to the weak,—and a scorn to the bad.

Affliction is sent *for purposes of trial*.—It belongs essentially to probation that we should be proved, and it is with this view that afflictions are often appointed. In this case they are in the nature of tests applied to our principles and dispositions: they are experiments employed to discover the reality and the degree of the good or evil that is in us. Not that this is unknown to God, but it is unknown to us; and nothing tends so effectually to develop it, as that change of circumstances which awakens latent energies, and renders prominent our prevailing principles and dispositions. We learn that the whole course of the divine procedure towards the Israelites in the wilderness, partook of the nature of a trial; it was to humble them and prove them, to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no. With this view he was perpetually exposing them to difficulties and dangers, which were calculated to try the strength of their faith, and the steadfastness of their obedience. At one time their fears were excited by the report of the warlike condition of their enemies;—at another, by the prospect of being starved for want of food in the wilderness:—now they were distressed by excessive thirst, where no water could be had;—and then they were terrified by the appearance of dreadful serpents, whose venomous bite caused instant death. And without this process, the extent of their

depravity could never have been known, either by themselves or by others. Do we not need also to be proved? Are we not in constant danger, through the deceitfulness of our hearts, of forming an erroneous view of our moral condition—of thinking that the evil within us is less, or the good is more than it really is? While our views are in these respects erroneous, we are in a state of delusion; we do not see things as they really are, but are totally deceived as to our true condition, and therefore must form a wrong judgment respecting every thing around us; for where a man is wrong as to some fundamental principle, his ignorance will possess more or less influence with respect to a great variety of truths which are dependent upon it. If, therefore, a man has not a proper knowledge of himself, and of his true state, he can form no right judgment concerning God, or of his dispensations, whether of providence or of grace. For this reason, God is perpetually subjecting us to tests, the design of which is to bring us acquainted with the secrets of our own hearts. There are evils from which we may think ourselves exempt, because we have been in conditions which have sheltered our weakness. There are excellencies which we may presume upon possessing, only because we have never been called to display them. There are provocations with which we have never been tried, the effect of which would render us a wonder to ourselves.

How often do the poor envy the rich their wealth, their leisure, their influence, and their opportunities of usefulness. "O!" says some poor christian, "if I had but the property and the power of doing good possessed by that man, how useful would I be;—how much should I rejoice to aid the cause of God—to befriend the poor—to cause the heart of the widow and the orphan to sing for joy. Providence smiles upon him." He prospers in business,—riches increase,—and he gains the elevation he desired. But what becomes of his

purposes of usefulness? Alas! as his circumstances change, he changes also. New objects and relations call forth new feelings, and develop improbable corruption. As riches increase, he becomes anxious, and eager, and worldly; his desires keep out-growing his possessions,—he adopts new and expensive habits,—he yields to indulgences, which in course of time become necessary, and pursues a style of living which causes him in the midst of fulness to be in straits; so that he imagines he has less to give now than when he was in poverty. Here prosperity is the trial; but affliction is often sent for the same purpose. The rich will sometimes censure the poor for want of patience, submission, and contentment. “You should remember,” says one of these advisers of the poor, “that there is a peculiar blessedness connected with poverty,—it exempts from many snares, and is connected with many promises,—it is the path in which the Saviour himself travelled through the world, and it will be followed, if duly improved, by a rich and glorious recompense.” Presently, perhaps, the circumstances of this prompt reprover are so changed, as to bring him strictly under the operation of the rule or principle which he has so ably explained and applied to others. He first feels a surprise, a sort of inward blushing, that he should find himself so indisposed to act up to the advice he had so confidently given,—then a regret that he should have so committed himself,—then a dislike to the rule which he now feels to be utterly repugnant to his natural inclinations,—and finally, perhaps, he attempts to explain it away, or so far to modify it, as to furnish an apology for his want of that temper, for the deficiency of which he had so severely censured others.

Sometimes christians make a boast of their attachment to the cause of Christ: they appear to be superior to all opposition,—they are confident in their own strength and constancy, and are disposed to be severe and censorious toward

others who fall into error. The case of Peter is an example. The Saviour had warned him of the approach of temptation ; unconscious, however, of his weakness, he boldly professed his readiness to follow his master even unto death,—“ I will lay down my life for thee ;” nay, he even places himself above all his brethren, and considers himself less likely to fall than they,—“ Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.” When Peter said this he was no doubt sincere,—he spake according to his feelings ;—but sincerity is not constancy ; there is a goodness compared to the “ morning cloud and the early dew, which goeth away.” Peter did not distinguish between an impulse and a principle—between an hour of ease and a moment of danger. How was he to be corrected and instructed but by trial ? He was therefore put to the test, and he failed. When danger looked him in the face, and the cross to which he promised to follow his master stood before him, his fears predominated—his courage fled ; to shelter himself from the threatening danger, he denied his Lord,—denied him again and again,—denied him with oaths and imprecations ; and became in consequence an object of grief and abhorrence to himself. In this way afflictions are rendered humbling to the christian ; they show him the lurking and unsuspected evils of his heart ; they convince him that he has much less grace than, perhaps, he presumed on possessing, and thus they excite him to a closer walk with God.

But trials may be intended for the manifestation of grace, as well as for the detection of sin and error. Look at Job. The accuser of the brethren had charged him with serving God from interested motives ; and had boldly asserted, that if his possessions were withdrawn he would curse God to his face. How was this to be decided ? God allowed Satan to strip him of his cattle, his servants, and his children. What was the result ? Instead of breaking out into rebellion, he wor-

ships and says, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Satan was disappointed, but not silenced. He now affirms, that if Job's person were touched, his hypocrisy would be rendered apparent: "behold, he is in thine hand," was the reply, "only spare his life;" and presently Job is tried to the uttermost. See him covered with sore boils, sitting among ashes, and scraping himself with a potsherd. Around him sit his friends, who cruelly irritate his wounds, by endeavouring to prove that uncommon suffering is the mark of uncommon guilt; whilst his wife, amazed at his integrity, derides him as a dotard, and asks, in the language of contempt, "dost thou still retain thine integrity, blessing God and dying?" for such alone can be considered the rational rendering of her words. Here was the trial. His faith, however, sustained him: "in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." He bore the proof, and was found to be gold; but he was not free from dross. He partially failed in the process, and even cursed the day of his birth; nevertheless, the reality and extent of his grace were demonstrated,—Satan was defeated,—God was glorified,—religion was ornamented,—Job himself was ultimately benefitted,—and an example of meek submission and patient endurance was furnished for the edification of the church to all succeeding ages. Thus God often proves his people. He places them for a time in the furnace of affliction; he heaps up the fuel, and increases the heat of the furnace to an intensity which threatens to consume rather than purify them; yet he sits by, and watches the process; and as the refiner is satisfied when he sees his face reflected on the surface of the silver, from a conviction that the purifying process is completed, so the Lord is well pleased when he hath thus turned his hand upon them, and purely purged away their dross, and taken away all their tin;—

"He looks, and loves his image there."

He then withdraws the fuel, takes out the gold, and sweetly whispers to the soul, "the trial of your faith, which is much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, though it be tried as with fire, shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Afflictions are intended for *instruction*.—Therefore we are commanded, "to hear the voice of the rod, and who hath appointed it." It was the saying of Luther, "the school of affliction is the school that giveth light;" and, indeed, it is one where not a few have commenced their acquaintance with God and divine things. God spake to them in their prosperity, but they would not hear. He then changed the scene, and brought them into trouble, and this became the mean of exciting their attention, and led them to say, "speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth:" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Affliction, by stopping our career in wrong, and by giving us, as it were, a pause, awakens the mind to reflection, and opens upon our view a scene to which, in a course of uninterrupted prosperity, we, perhaps, should never have raised our eyes. When the mind of man is engrossed by wrong desires and pursuits, his whole attention engaged, and his whole heart filled, to speak to him of the error of his ways, or to suggest to him the impropriety of his conduct, generally produces as little impression as the sun-beam playing upon the dry and barren rock. But let his desires be thwarted, and his pursuits disappointed; let the good on which his heart is fixed be withdrawn, and the evil which he dislikes and dreads be given in its place; and he will soon be in a disposition proper for serious reflection and divine instruction. In this way many, like Manasseh, have had reason to bless God for their affliction and bonds, as the means of their repentance and deliverance from ruin.

Affliction is also a school of divine institution, for training up the children of God for their inheritance in heaven. Here

some of the most eminent saints have had the principal part of their education, and it is here they have made their richest acquisitions in the knowledge and experience of divine things. Here they have learned to estimate aright the comparative value of the creature and the Creator,—the life of sense and the life of faith,—the things of time, and the things of eternity. When they were first placed there, they knew but little of God, or of themselves, or of the methods of providence and grace. They thought that as soon as they had passed the straight gate their difficulties would be entirely over ;—that, having obtained a good hope through grace, and an adoption into the family of God, they should be in trouble no more as other men, but walk in a path of uninterrupted enjoyment. When, therefore, they saw holy persons greatly afflicted, they knew not how to account for it. They supposed that to be afflicted was to be miserable,—that inward peace and outward trouble were incompatible ; and to rejoice in tribulation seemed a paradoxical saying, altogether incomprehensible. So foolish were they and ignorant. But when they were brought into affliction themselves, they found that it was not so formidable and destructive as they had imagined, but in an eminent degree beneficial and consolatory. They were brought to see so much of the deceitfulness and corruption of their own hearts, of the vanity of the world, of the evil sin, of the insufficiency of the creature ; and so much of divine wisdom, love, and faithfulness, in their affliction itself ; and they felt also such supports and comforts under it, that at the very time their eyes were streaming with tears, you might have heard them sing,—

“ Dear Father, we consent,
To discipline divine ;
And bless the pangs that make our souls
Still more completely thine.”

Yet, it is in affliction that many of the saints of God have learned some of their sweetest lessons, and received some of the most endearing manifestations of the faithfulness and truth, of the power and love of God. Often, when compelled to spend their days in pain and solitude, Jesus has appeared to them in such glorious and gracious manifestations of his presence, and spoken to them words of such condescending compassion and love, and given them such glimpses of the glory to be revealed hereafter, that their solitude has become a kind of Patmos to their souls, where they have been favored with the fullest revelation of a Redeemer's love. Hence, said David, "blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of thy law." Nor did he speak from reasoning or observation merely, but from experience: "it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." "We fear," says Bishop Hall, "our best friends ; for my part I have learned more of God and of myself from one week's extremity, than the prosperity of a whole life had taught me." Another eminent saint, on his recovery from a severe affliction, informed his congregation, "that during the ten weeks he had been confined by sickness, he had learned more of Christ than he had previously acquired by forty years' reading and study.

A PROPER BEHAVIOUR UNDER AFFLICTION.

Attend, my soul, with reverend awe,
The dictates of thy God ;
Silent and trembling, hear the voice
Of his appointed rod.

Now let me search and try my ways,
And humbly seek his face ;
Conscious of guilt, before his throne,
In dust my soul abase.

Teach me, O God, what's yet unknown,
And all my sins forgive ;
Those sins I would no more repeat,
But to thy honour live.

“ LET US SEARCH AND TRY OUR WAYS, AND TURN AGAIN
TO THE LORD.”

LAM. III., XXXIII.

ALL the dispensations of God, whether agreeable or painful, are beneficial or injurious according to the temper of mind in which they are received and used. Comforts,—if they promote gratitude, love, and obedience, become blessings; but if they induce pride, vain-glory, presumption, and forgetfulness of God, they become judgments. Afflictions,—if they are received with humility, penitence, and submission, are blessings; but if they excite murmuring, impatience, and

incorrigibleness, they become judgments, and the forerunners of still greater severity. Our case is truly alarming when even medicine is administered in vain. "It is bad," says Bishop Hopkins, "to lose the lives of our friends, but it is worse to lose their death." "It is a serious thing," says Henry, "to lose a calamity." "And we ought," says Owen, "to pray for a blessing upon our daily rod, as well as upon our daily bread." How, then, ought we to suffer? In what manner are afflictions to be improved, that we may derive from them the benefit they are intended to convey? For they operate not by miracle or charm. They are but means employed for our spiritual advantage. It would be well if persons would exercise upon this subject the same common sense which they evince in the ordinary concerns of life; they would thereby save themselves from a thousand errors. See the husbandman: he knows that God gives the increase, but he also knows how he gives it, and therefore manures and ploughs, sows and weeds; his reliance upon God teaches him that favourable seasons and influences are necessary to ripen the corn, but he is never guilty of such folly as to go forth at harvest and expect to reap where he has not sown; nevertheless, such is the folly of many with regard to their spiritual concerns. They complain that their afflictions yield them no profit: can it be otherwise, so long as they continue to neglect those means which are necessary to render them instructive and edifying? Affliction, to be profitable, must induce

Self-examination.—We are all prone in time of health and prosperity to be unmindful of this duty. We are much abroad observing others, but little at home examining ourselves. Outward objects attract us to that degree, that we pass by those within. But in a season of affliction our thoughts are called inward. Now God commands silence that he may be heard, and removes intervening objects that he may be seen.

He shuts us up in the house of mourning that we may have opportunity for reflection, and that our thoughts may be directed to the investigation of our state. How proper, therefore, when we feel the smart of the rod, whether in our person or family, or circumstances, to examine ourselves, and seek, by divine assistance, to know wherefore God contendeth with us, and what he would have us to do. Seriously enquire, then, afflicted reader, are you in Christ or not? Are you yet far from God, or have you been brought nigh by the blood of Christ? See that you be faithful and honest in the enquiry; willing to know the whole truth, however much it may militate against yourself, or tend to increase your present distress. Instead of listening to the voice of flattery, hearken to the charges of conscience, and especially to the solemn and infallible statements of God's word. Seek not to palliate your sins, or to persuade yourself that your state is safe, when it is not so; for by this deception thousands are ruined for eternity. Because they are not worse than others,—because their morality is superior to that of the openly profane,—because they perform their outward rounds of duties,—because their charities abound,—they flatter themselves that they have nothing to apprehend. Such is the persuasion of multitudes who are going down to the pit with a lie in their right hand. The heart of man is deceitful above all things. Let your enquiry be conducted under a full conviction of this truth. Tremble at the thought of deception, where such important and awful consequences are involved. Be content to know the worst of your case, and thoroughly to understand the evil and danger of your condition, that you may be excited to seek after the appropriate remedy. With this view, examine the marks of Christless, unconverted persons, as contained in God's word, and judge yourself by them. Consider also the evidences of a state of grace and of salvation, and see how far they belong to you. If after enquiry, you find

that your state is bad,—that you have loved the world more than God,—that you have cared more for the body than the soul,—that you have lived in the indulgence of sin and in the neglect of Christ and his salvation ; O ! then be convinced of your inability to help yourself, and of your absolute need of Christ as a Saviour. Labour to be deeply humbled before God under a sense of your sin and folly ; and in order to this, enter upon a solemn review of the sins of your past life. Contemplate their nature, their number, and their deserts. One sin would have subjected you to the sentence of God's law, and exposed you to his displeasure ; but you have committed sins more in number, and greater in aggravation, than you can conceive of: your whole life has been one continued sin. You have, so far as God is concerned, done nothing but sin. Your transgressions have sent up a cry to heaven for vengeance. You are actually under the curse of the Almighty. O ! does not such an amount of sin call for deep repentance ? Where shall you find deliverance from its guilt,—its curse,—but in the Saviour whom God hath provided ? Besides, there is the sin of your nature, as well as of your conduct. The heart is the polluted source from which flow all the evils that defile the life. Many frequently attempt to palliate their guilt by pleading, that though their practice is defective, yet their hearts are good ; but this is a grievous error, for every human heart is desperately wicked. Why do men refuse to seek, and serve, and love God ? because the carnal mind is enmity against him. Why do sinners go on in sin ? because they love it. This was not the original condition of man, for he was created holy, just, and good ; but is the result of his apostacy, and the consequence of sin. It is of vast importance for you to know that you are thus totally corrupt in your very nature, and through all your faculties ; for without this knowledge, you will be taken up with a mere outward reformation, to the neglect of an entire inward renovation.

Nothing short of this can be effective. Without this you are undone for ever. You need not only the pardon of actual sin, you must have "a new heart," "a right spirit," or you cannot be saved. I exhort you therefore, to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. I entreat you, by every thing dear to you, by your eternal happiness, to escape for your life,—to fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel. Delay not in making application to Christ. Apply to him that he may teach you the will of God,—reconcile you to his Father,—pardon your sins,—renew you by his spirit,—and save you from eternal wrath.

But are you a subject of God's grace? Can you trace in yourself the evidence of a change of heart? Still there may be need for close examination. Perhaps there is some corruption unmortified,—some evil temper indulged,—some duty neglected,—some idol to which your heart clings with criminal determination. Perhaps your closet testifies against you, that you have not frequented it;—your bible, that you have not perused it;—your sanctuary, that you have not profited by its ordinances. Be assured that when God afflicts, it is not without cause; and not unfrequently the nature of the evil for which God contends with us may be traced out in the chastisements with which he visits us, so that we can see the cause in the effect—the sin in the punishment. Do you suffer in your health? Examine, then, whether you have not been vain of your strength and beauty. Are you injured in your reputation? Perhaps you have made your good name a ground of self-exaltation, or you have been too mindful of human opinion. Is it your estate which is touched? Consider whether you have not indulged in excessive attachment to earthly things, and to the gratifications of the flesh. If, upon enquiry, you find sin written upon your suffering; then speedily repent of that sin,—humble yourself in the sight of God on account of it, and let it be instantly put away. This

is the voice, the injunction of the rod ; and here your special duty is humiliation. But if conscience charges you with no indulged evil ; if, after close and impartial scrutiny, you see not that you have wilfully departed from God, humbly bless him for his restraining grace in preserving you from the great transgression, and while you acknowledge, with sincere contrition, your general failings,—your coldness in devotion,—your negligence in duty,—your wandering thoughts,—your want of vigilance, and zeal, and fervour,—regard the affliction as sent for wise and merciful ends, though the design may not yet be apparent, and submit to it with humility and lowliness of mind, until that design be clearly unfolded. In whatever way it may be intended to operate, its object is the promotion of your welfare. The Saviour was made perfect through sufferings, and the character of every christian is more formed and improved by his afflictions than by his enjoyments. How many, by the enrichment of their faith and hope, have been constrained to say, “ it is good for me that I have been afflicted.” How much of your happiness in heaven will arise from your present conflicts ! The very trial of your faith is precious ; and the crown of life is promised, not to him who escapes, but to him that endures temptation. Afflictions are heavenly agents, and “ work out for us a far more, exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.” Study, therefore, to improve your affliction to this end. It may be, however, that the afflictions are for righteousness’ sake,—for keeping a good conscience,—for adhering to the truth as it is in Jesus—and for attachment to his cause. In this case it loses its name, and becomes an honour—a filling up of the measure of a Saviour’s sufferings ; and you ought to “ glorify God in this behalf.” Your affliction has not merely a blessing in it, but it is in itself a blessing ; for “ blessed are ye when men persecute you for righteousness’ sake.” But take heed that it is for righteousness’ sake that you suffer, and not for

your own faults. We are too apt to think well of ourselves, and to put that down to the cause of righteousness, which ought rather to be ascribed to our own folly or imprudence. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye ; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you : on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."

Affliction should be improved by *fervent prayer*. There is no effectual consolation under any trouble but in God ; and, therefore, prayer to him is the great resource of the afflicted. It is in consequence recommended by infinite goodness and mercy : "is any afflicted ? let him pray." But it cannot be concealed that this resource is not the first to which our natural feelings turn, or to which calamity of itself will bring us. Some there are who will neither call upon God in health nor in sickness,—neither acknowledge God's bounty in their prosperity, nor implore his aid in adversity. The state of such is truly awful, and furnishes an impressive proof of the natural aversion of the heart to God. Many, however, who in the time of health and prosperity, have neglected and forgotten God, have been led by the pressure of calamity to cry to him in their distress, and often the Lord has wrought great and unexpected deliverances in answer to their prayer. When every other refuge fails, it is easy to convince a man that there is no refuge but God. It is necessary, however, to warn such against deception, lest they construe the cry which is wrung from them by the excess of grief, into an evidence of spiritual concern, or of sincere and faithful prayer ; or the deliverances which they receive from God, as proofs that he accepts of their persons or their supplications. This is often a fatal delusion. God does, indeed, at times extend delivering mercy to those who in the time of trouble first think of seeking him, and it ought to be regarded as an evidence of his

patience and longsuffering, giving them farther space for repentance, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, and live." But before any one adopts a persuasion that these providential mercies are proofs of special favor, he should take time to examine whether the religious impressions wrought upon his heart in time of trouble be sincere and abiding, and discover themselves by corresponding and permanent effects in his life. Affliction and penitence by no means necessarily accompany each other, and even when they seem to meet, they too often depart together. The man's goodness proves as "a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away." He becomes more hardened and indifferent than ever, and "the last state of that man is worse than the first." The sincerity and spirituality of prayer appears in our being more concerned about the evils which have occasioned the affliction, than about the affliction itself: in our being more solicitous to have our suffering sanctified, than to have it removed. Afflicted reader! the Almighty graciously allows you to bring your affliction before him, and to plead the promise of deliverance; but remember, in order that your prayer may be heard with acceptance, it is indispensable that you seek to have the design accomplished for which it was sent. Is that design the removal of sin,—the conversion of your soul? To this then, principally, let your prayer be directed. Pray for the divine blessing on your affliction; pray for divine light, that you may see the evil of sin, and especially the evil of your own heart;—pray that sin may be made hateful to you, and that you may have strength to renounce and to resist it: prostrate yourself at the foot of the mercy seat, confess your sins with deep humiliation, and pray for pardon as one that feels his awful desert. "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." The Lord will not despise your prayer. Pray in faith, believing that "God is,

and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Let the atonement and intercession of the Saviour be all your plea. Confess yourself ruined and undone without Christ, and agonise until you prevail. Pray for the Holy Spirit; without his assistance you can neither pray, nor repent,—neither believe, nor submit. Do not satisfy yourself with the prayers of others, either ministers or friends, for what can they avail for you if you pray not for yourself? Lift up your soul to God; "pour out your heart before him." True religion is a personal thing, and prayer especially is a personal duty. Without this you cannot be saved. Remember that the primary object of prayer, in your case, is the pardon of sin: this alone can establish peace between God and you; and this alone can give peace to your troubled conscience. Continue, therefore, instant in prayer. Plead with the Most High as Jacob with the Angel of the Covenant, when he exclaimed, as he held fast his eagerness, and his appointed access to God, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Pray, as did the believing Syro-Phoenician, who clung as it were to the robe of Jesus, crying, "Lord, help me," and turned even his appearance of aversion and denial into an argument for mercy. "It is not meet," said he, "to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." "Truth, Lord," replied the earnest petitioner, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Imitate the importunity of Bartimeus, amidst the numberless causes of hindrance and discouragement by which you are surrounded. The disciples would have restrained the eagerness of his entreaty, "but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Agonise in prayer

Until God, with cloudless demonstration to your soul,
Reveal his promis'd grace.

But is the reader a subject of God's converting grace? still if there be a consciousness of guilt as the procuring cause of your suffering, in what manner can you expect relief otherwise than by coming to God even as at the first, with penitence, confession of sin, and earnest prayer for a renewed manifestation of his forgiving love? This is your first, your most urgent duty. Let not this be delayed. Put away the evil, if not yet removed, and earnestly beseech your heavenly Father to heal your backslidings and again to love you freely. If, however, you are free from the charge of wilful transgression, still prayer is the mean by which you are to seek the mercies appropriate to your condition. By this mean you are sure to obtain either deliverance from your affliction, or support and preservation in it; for the mercy of God is often much more displayed by giving us support and consolation under our trials than it could be by their removal; and, as he is a God of judgment, and always exercises mercy wisely, he will be sure to answer our prayers in that way which is most beneficial to us as well as most promotive of his own glory. It may be, therefore, that prayer may neither procure for you the removal, nor even the mitigation of your distress; this may not accomplish the purpose which your heavenly father has in view, nor ought you to ask it but with humble deference to his will: but this it will effect,—it will secure to you the gracious presence and consolation of God in your trouble; he will cause his grace to be sufficient for you, he will perfect strength in your weakness, he will favor you with such revelations of his goodness, such irradiations of his love and favor, that where afflictions abound consolations shall much more abound. Thus he will know your soul in adversity, and give accomplishment to his promise, “when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither

shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." God invites his people to call upon him in their trouble, and thus he answers :— he answers by his promises, speaking peace to the soul ; he answers by his spirit, strengthening them in their inner man, and inspiring them with joy and peace in believing ; he answers by his providence, bringing in seasonable relief, or working out deliverance for them. And if God proportions our strength to the degree and continuance of our trouble, if he keep us from offending him by impatience and discontent, if he recompence outward losses and afflictions with special manifestations of his presence and favor, and make death at last a complete discharge from all our troubles, then is his promise most faithfully fulfilled.

Affliction should be attended by *submission*,—not the constrained submission of necessity,—not a stoical insensibility, or an affected superiority to pain and calamity, which has been so often and so unjustly extolled as the highest attainment of virtue,—but a cheerful resignation to the will of God. With the most rigid of the ancient philosophers insensibility was deemed the perfection of virtue and wisdom. "Gnaw as thou wilt," said one of these, apostrophising an excruciating distemper with which he was afflicted, "thou shalt never compel me to confess that pain is an evil." He spake the language of obstinacy and system, a language which his feelings belied. The groans that interrupted his words, proved the futility of a system at variance with reason, and shewed that to support humanity under trying circumstances, to produce patience without obstinacy, and resignation without despondency, requires other motives than those which philosophy furnishes. The gospel addresses us as men,—as beings susceptible, both in mind and body, of enjoyment and of pain. It allows the tear to flow when the heart is wounded ; indeed, if our afflictions were not felt, they would not be afflictions. It is well

observed by an heathen writer, "that the more sensible perception a man hath of the evils he suffers, when yet he is contented to suffer for the sake of virtue, so much the more properly he may be said to be courageous." The submission which is required of us is that temper of mind which disposes us to put a check upon every thing that is rebellious in our thoughts, words, and carriage; and which secures such a degree of composure and inward tranquillity, as enables us to think coolly and deliberately on the ways of providence;—to examine the cause of our affliction, and the purpose it may be intended to accomplish;—to advert to all the circumstances of alleviation which may be connected with it;—to converse freely with our friends respecting the trial, and calmly to acquiesce in a condition of the disadvantages of which we may be fully sensible. O happy man! who hath gained such an ascendancy over the passions of his nature, that whilst he laments the loss of one comfort, he can yet taste the sweetness of those that remain; who, amidst the weakness of his nature has sufficient firmness to break through every difficulty, and betake himself to the appropriate duties of his condition; who, though God seems as if he were about to destroy him, can yet converse with him, and read, and think, and pray, and find a relish for these sacred exercises. Labour, therefore, to display this state of mind, whatever may be the character of your condition, or the peculiarity of your affliction. Impatience turns the rod into a scorpion, and transfixes more deeply the barbed arrows of sorrow. Till you wipe from your eyes the suffusion of tears you cannot see what God is doing, and while the noisy passions are clamorous, his addresses cannot be heard. You are not to excuse improper dispositions in affliction, by saying, "it was so trying, who could help it?" This would be to justify rebellion by the very means which God employs in order to induce submission. Be assured that the fault is not in the condition but in the

temper. All things are to us what we make them. It is not so much the state of things without us, as the disposition which predominates within, that constitutes our real condition, and gives the tone to our emotions. The very same circumstances, therefore, which in one state of mind quite overwhelm us, in another and a better one, are reduced to their proper insignificance. The experience of the Psalmist, as delineated in the 130th Psalm, furnishes a striking illustration. In the commencement he describes his state as one of deep calamity,—one from which he saw no outlet,—one with which his soul struggled even to agony, but yet seemed to be sinking lower and lower into the black and fathomless gulf of despair. At length he looked out of himself for help and deliverance. He raised his eye from the calamities around him to the compassion of God above him. By faith his cries were prolonged, and raised into persevering application, and from faith there sprang the calm of submission and of hope. He believed in the mercy of God, he trusted in the promise of God, and therefore he waited quietly in patient expectation of the help of God. Yet he had no more distinct reasons for hope than he possessed before. There were no further assurances of help than existed before. There were no further assurances of help revealed; no new facts had occurred; no interposition had been vouchsafed; all things were just the same; and yet how inexpressibly different was his state of mind! how widely opposite the spirit with which he looked out upon these facts! and therefore he beheld a corresponding difference in the aspect of the facts themselves. Every thing was viewed at first in itself alone, and he sank in dismay; every thing at last was viewed in God, and he became submissive and hopeful. Not that things had altered, but that his mind had changed. The idea of God had been gradually rising in his mind. God's compassion was remembered, God's character and promises were meditated upon, until his mind rose from

one degree of buoyancy to another, and at last the mists of doubt and despondency were left beneath him, and he sprang into the pure and unclouded region of steadfast faith and unreserved submission, where he even sang for joy. Be it your concern to imitate his example. "Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." Let not sorrow drive you into sin, but "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass." "For the Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him."

In affliction we should cherish a *thankful spirit*. There is no state that does not require gratitude. However afflictive our circumstances may be, there is always much more to call for gratitude than for complaint. The praise of God is never out of season. It is, therefore, his will that in every thing we should give thanks: in things adverse, as well as prosperous;—dark, as well as light;—grievous, as well as joyous. This, however, is a duty too commonly neglected. We are naturally selfish, and our selfishness appears in our very devotions. We are backward to every duty of religion; we are backward to pray, but still more to praise. Pressed by our difficulties, and urged by our wants, we are constrained to pray, but we too often pray in our distress as if our case was one of unqualified calamity, which admitted of no feeling but that of disquietude, and of no language but that of complaint; therefore it is that we are so often overwhelmed with sorrow: whereas, connected with our afflictions there are innumerable circumstances, all consoling in their tendency, and which call for grateful and fervent acknowledgment: nay, those things which seem the most unfriendly to our wishes and welfare, did we know all, would probably draw forth our highest praises. We must always distinguish between what is pleasing, and what is profitable. Though correction is not

agreeable to the child, yet it is so good for him that he who spareth the rod hateth his son. Medicine is unpalatable ; but it is good for the patient, and renewed health more than reconciles him to the infliction and the expense. The vine-dresser does the tree good, not by suffering the wanton shoots to grow on draining the sap, but by pruning it that it may bring forth more fruit. In this way our greatest crosses are often productive of our choicest blessings, and justly claim our highest praises. Yes, if temporal suffering is an evidence of our heavenly Father's kindness and care ;—if, through the operation of his word and Spirit, it is productive of spiritual and eternal benefits ;—if it softens, in one sense, and invigorates in another, —if it humbles and reclaims, —if it purifies and refines, —if it awakens conscience when asleep, —if it detaches from the world, —if it raises the soul to heaven, and reconciles us to the last event ;—does it not demand our grateful acknowledgment ? The restraint which God places upon our desires and pursuits, is not less indicative of mercy. The child cries when the father places beyond his reach the knife he was going to grasp, unconscious of the dangerous nature of the weapon ; but is not the father's love as conspicuous in this as in conferring an object gratifying to the wishes of the child ? And if God crosses our purpose, to save our souls, if he negatives our wishes to promote our welfare, then does he not deserve our praise ? Come then, afflicted reader, not only seek to justify the ways of God, in all his dealings with you, but also reckon up your mercies. Search out every thing in your condition, and every thing in the divine dispensations, past, present, and future, which prefers a claim to your gratitude. Examine your condition ; bring forth to view all its alleviations, and supports, and comforts. You are afflicted, but it is not in hell ;—you have many crosses, but you have also many consolations ;—you have been much tried, but you have hitherto been supported ;—your cup is

bitter, but what would it have been if there had not been in it a large mixture of mercy? Think of your sins and of your deserts;—of what you have done against God, and of what he has done for you, and is still willing to do for you. Think of his redeeming love,—of his providential care,—of his sparing mercy,—of his calls and strivings,—of his invitations and promises. Has he ever left you?—has he ever turned away your prayer from him, or his mercy from you? And is it for you to be wrapped up in selfishness, and to indulge in complaint? How unworthy of a creature, but how much more unworthy of a christian. The pious Baxter, at a time when suffering from an agonising disease, was visited by a friend, and on being asked how he was, replied, “I am tormented, but, blessed be God, it is not in the fire of hell.”

In affliction we should labour to *detach our affections from created objects, and seek our happiness in God alone.* Prosperity is not the situation in which we are the most likely to live above the world. The longer we live in prosperity, and the more dependent we usually are on the creature, and the less mindful of the Creator. Present things easily and naturally gain possession of our hearts; while riches increase, we set our affections upon them: pleasures enlarge the desire of gratification, and one indulgence requires another. But there can be no enjoyment of God, there can be no preparation for heaven, in such a state of mind as this. It is suited only to present things; and its possessor, to be happy, should live here for ever. This he cannot do, and therefore a higher and nobler temper must be cherished. It is for the purpose of inducing this, that God sends heavy crosses, and heart-rending disappointments. Affliction, with a faithful but harsh voice, rouses us from the pleasing delusion. It warns us to arise and depart from these inferior delights, because here is not our rest;—it teaches us that the honour which cometh of men is fading as the flower that perisheth;—it

teaches how inefficacious are all earthly blessings in imparting real and abiding felicity; and, as the sweeping tempest and the beating surge teach the mariner to prize the haven where undisturbed repose awaits his arrival; so, in like manner, disappointments, vexations, and crosses, teach us that God alone is the proper object of confidence and the true source of enjoyment. Creatures are broken reeds, but he is the rock of ages. They are broken cisterns; he is the fountain of living waters. Yes, here is something firm and certain. God will not deceive us, and cannot disappoint us. His power is almighty;—his mercy endureth for ever;—his word is faithfulness and truth: therefore David says, “my soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.”

Reader, the design of your affliction is to teach you to fix your hope on God;—to remind you, that

“ He builds too low,
Who builds beneath the skies; ”

to wean you from created good, and to instruct you how to enjoy an infinite, an eternal portion. Your earthly props are overthrown that you may build on a firmer foundation;—your temporal enjoyments are embittered, that you may long for those happy mansions where all tears shall be wiped away from your eyes. As Young sings,

“ Our hearts are fasten’d to this world,
With strong and various ties;
But every trouble cuts a string,
And urges us to rise.”

The objects of your confidence and hope are removed, that you may feel that there is nothing on which you can firmly place your hope but the promises of the gospel,—an interest in Christ,—the enjoyment of God,—and the assurance of life

eternal. Now, therefore, if ever, these things will be welcome to you. 'I see God will have *all* my heart, and he shall have it,' was the noble reflection made by a lady, when news was brought that her two children whom she tenderly loved were drowned. This is what God requires from you,—your whole heart. Turn, therefore, to him, as the proper portion of your soul;—cleave to him above all;—depend upon him as your chief good;—content yourself with him as all-sufficient to give to the soul suitable and full satisfaction;—make him your trust, your love, your joy, your hope, your delight. Here you cannot be too earnest, too ambitious, too covetous, too confident. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full."

Affliction must be attended by a *patient waiting for God's time and method of deliverance*. You may desire deliverance; religion does not forbid that, but then your desires must not be rash, insisting, or unconditional, but always closed with, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." You may employ means of deliverance, for God works by means, and frequently employs us as agents in removing the burdens under which we suffer; but those means are to be lawful ones. Affliction is sometimes spoken of as a prison-house, but, in order to obtain deliverance, we are not violently to throw down our prison walls, but rather to say, "he who confined me shall bring me forth; I will stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." Many ways of deliverance may present themselves, but we are to choose only God's way; willing rather to endure calamity than commit sin. If we cannot free ourselves from an entangling and perplexing providence, but by breaking a command, we ought to be content to suffer. It is a sad exchange we make, when, by adopting some unlawful method of deliverance, we wrest ourselves out of the hands of God, in order to place ourselves in the hands of Satan.

See this in the case of Saul. He was hard pressed by the enemies of Israel: his foes were menacing an assault: his own troops dispirited, and cowardly, were deserting him in great numbers. His situation became every hour more alarming; there appeared but one method of escape,—that was to give instant battle to the enemy; but in doing so he must disobey the command of God. He had been directed to wait seven days until Samuel should arrive, to preside in the offices of religion. What course did the monarch pursue?—rash and impatient, he took his cause out of the hands of God; he ventured to offer sacrifice without the presence of the prophet;—he presumed to do evil that good might come, and in consequence he incurred the divine displeasure, and the forfeiture of the crown he was endeavouring to secure. David fell into the same error, “I shall now perish,” said he, “one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.” The oracle, if he had consulted it, would not have told him so. In truth, it was the worst measure he could have devised. It tended to alienate the affections of his countrymen;—to justify the reproaches of his adversaries;—to deprive himself of the means of grace;—to put himself out of the divine protection;—and to lay himself under obligations to a benefactor whom he could not oblige without betraying the cause of God and the interests of Israel. Accordingly, he was soon drawn into a scandalous equivocation with Achish. Then he was ordered to go and fight against his own people. And when he was released from this embarrassment, and went back, he found that in his absence his residence and property had been destroyed, and his family carried away captives. In the holy martyrs, spoken of in the 11th chap. of Hebrews, we have an example of an opposite kind. They generously scorned to accept of deliverance, when it was offered to them upon unworthy and unlawful terms. They were not so reckless of life as

to have cast it away, could they have preserved both it and their religion also : but when the condition of their temporal salvation was the relinquishment of their hope in God ; when they could no longer live here unless they consented to die eternally, they felt no hesitation in determining which course they ought to pursue : they cheerfully welcomed the scaffold and the stake, not counting their lives dear unto themselves so that they might finish their course with joy. Whatever, therefore, be your affliction, abstain from all unworthy and unlawful methods for its removal ; choose rather to abide quietly under its pressure than by any unwarrantable means to obtain relief ; contentedly wear the yoke rather than violently break it ; willingly continue poor rather than enrich yourself by deception, falsehood, and injustice ; contentedly endure contempt and reproach, rather than attempt by sinful compliances to regain the favor and esteem of men ; patiently bear any inconvenience or distress, rather than set your face towards Egypt, or have recourse to any succour which God disallows. Wait his time, with prayer and patience ; and be assured that you will find his mercy, in moderating your affliction ; his power, in supporting you under it ; his goodness, in his time (which is always the best), to deliver you from it ; and his bounty, in rendering your suffering productive of a rich harvest of spiritual consolation and advantage. “ Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him, in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

In affliction we must guard against *an indignant and resentful conduct towards the instruments of our suffering*. We are too apt to look exclusively at secondary causes, and to overlook the great First Cause, who appoints and arranges all things according to the counsel of his own will. We fasten our eye on the instruments employed to chasten us, and forget the hand which wields that instrumentality only for the promotion of our welfare ; the consequence is, that when we

experience reproach, or injury, or oppression, we commonly think, because we have right on our side, that we are justified in any measure of violence and resistance towards those who have injured us ; but we should remember that this is the proper occasion for the display of christian charity. " For if, when we are buffeted for our faults, we take it patiently, what thank have we ? " this is the virtue of the suffering malefactor ; but if, when our good is evil spoken of,—our principles maligned,—our character assailed by misrepresentation, and our property injured,—if then we forbear all hasty and passionate vindication, and refrain from every species of retaliation, this is thankworthy,—this is charity. The operation of christian principle stills the tumult of indignant feeling, forbids all execrations on the head of him who would even destroy us, and restrains the hands from inflicting injury. " Fret not thyself," it argues, " because of evil doers, for they shall soon be cut off. Commit thy cause unto him that judgeth righteously. Trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widow, is God in his holy habitation." Nor does its operation stop here, but it dictates a beneficent course of conduct towards our adversaries : " love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." Besides, when we attempt to avenge ourselves upon the instrument, we do in effect thereby express our resentment of God's dealings with us ; and thus involve ourselves in the guilt of impiety and rebellion. The consideration of the hand from which the affliction comes should suppress all resentment towards the agent. When David fled from his son Absalom, and the anguish of his bleeding heart was cruelly aggravated by the insults of Shimei, what reconciled the sufferer to this bitter addition to his woe ? " Let him curse," said the afflicted monarch, " because the Lord hath said unto him, curse

David. Let him alone ; and let him curse ; for the Lord hath bidden him." He saw God's hand in the trial, and he was satisfied ; and how consolatory the hope which this view suggested to him : " it may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." We are never more likely to have our mourning turned into joy, than when we take our afflictions, through whatever channel they may come, patiently as from God's hands, and are satisfied with whatever is done, because he does it.

COMFORT IN AFFLICTION.

O child of sorrow ! be it thine to know
That scripture only is the cure of woe.
That field of promise, how it throws abroad
Its perfume o'er the christian's thorny road.
The soul reposing on assur'd belief,
Feels herself happy amidst all her grief ;
Forgets her labour as she toils along,
Weeps tears of joy, and bursts into a song.

" MY PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU, MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO
YOU ; NOT AS THE WORLD GIVETH, GIVE I UNTO YOU."

JOHN XIV, XXIX.

RIGHTEOUS men are entitled to peculiar privileges. One of these, and by no means the least important, is comfort in affliction. As in the present state no man is beyond the reach of trouble, good men suffer in common with their fellow creatures, but in their afflictions they have sources of consolation of which the world knoweth nothing. They are kept in peace : " thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." They hear the voice of Christ addressing them as he did his afflicted disciples, "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Having fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, they are authorised to expect strong consolation, and to appropriate to themselves the comforts which the word of

God so abundantly supplies. Here, in the lowest depths of affliction, is an unfailing source of consolation and delight. Whatever else is uncertain, fading, and deceptive, the word of God, on which he hath caused us to hope, is sure, faithful, and eternal. These comforts are various as our necessities, full as our desires, and free as our indigent circumstances require. When they are realised, no privation excites complaint, no pain disposes to murmuring, no angry passions agitate the breast, no fear of increasing trouble overwhelms the soul. They enable us to acquiesce in the dispensations of providence; like the wood with which Moses sweetened the bitter waters of Marah, they render our afflictions not only palatable, but also a subject of rejoicing, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." That you may realise these comforts, attentively consider

The paternal character of Deity. The gospel doctrine of reconciliation, with its consequence adoption, assures us, that God is the friend and father of all who believe in Christ Jesus. The proper effect of such a character, when seen in all its glorious excellency, is to banish distrust and suspicion, and to awaken admiring love and child-like confidence. The kindness and love of an earthly parent produce these feelings, and his very character is regarded as a sufficient warrant for an undeviating attention to our happiness and welfare. But what earthly parent will bear a comparison with God? He has none of the imperfections of his creatures, but, in all his dealings with his children, he is actuated by immutable truth, unbending fidelity, and infinite and unchanging love. They are assured that all things shall work together for their good; that prosperity shall be blessed, and affliction sanctified; that distress is not punishment, but correction, and trial, and discipline; "that he who spared not his only begotten Son, but

gave him up to death for them, will with him also freely give them all things;" all things truly needful for them—all things requisite to their eternal salvation. Affliction is among the promises of the covenant, and is sent as a special token of our heavenly father's love: "for whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." At the same time it cannot be too distinctly stated, or remembered, that God "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." The necessity of our affliction does not rest with God, but with ourselves; and, if our state was such as never to require affliction, he would never employ the rod. In all our sufferings how striking are the displays of his wisdom and mercy!

How conspicuous is his *paternal wisdom*. "His understanding is infinite." He knows the end from the beginning, and what are the best methods for accomplishing his own gracious purposes. He knows when to use the rod, and when to withhold it. He is acquainted with what measure to afflict; for "he remembereth that we are but dust." He will not, therefore, lay upon us more than we are able to bear; he will not afflict us beyond what he sees is essentially connected with our advantage. Intimately acquainted with all the circumstances of his people, their age, situation, dispositions, advantages, and temptations, he sees the particular kind of affliction which is needful for the promotion of their welfare. He places some of his saints in the vale of poverty, because he knows they could not resist the snares of affluence;—others he deprives of bodily health: some he dooms to months or years of great adversity;—others he bereaves of family and friends, and leaves them as forlorn pilgrims to grope their darkling way to the new Jerusalem. But, in all these methods of his providence, he is guided by that infinite wisdom which prompts him to study the different characters of his children, and to apportion that discipline to each of them which will

best secure the end of all the divine dispensations—the sanctification of their nature. We may not, at the present, be able to see the necessity that has prompted the affliction, nor the advantages which it is calculated to produce, because we do not fully know either ourselves, our defects, or our maladies; and therefore we cannot judge properly of the means employed to cure and improve us. But of this we may be assured, that he never errs in the time, the place, the continuance, the instrument, or the kind of affliction;—it is precisely the very thing we need; and nothing could be altered without injury.

How conspicuous, also, is his *paternal mercy*. There is much mercy mingled in the bitterest cup that ever our heavenly father puts into our hand. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” How merciful have been our afflictions in the *degree of their severity*. Take your sufferings and place them at the side of your deserts. Think how you have sinned against God;—how you have requited his love, and abused his patience;—how little fruit you have brought forth, and how little service you have rendered; and then say, what would you have suffered if you had met with your deserts? May you not exclaim with the prophet, “it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not?” How merciful in their *number*. Oh! how few have they been, compared with your mercies. Of this fact it is sometimes difficult to persuade the afflicted: the pressure of present suffering obliterates the recollection of past mercies. Life is beheld in all its gloom, and is regarded only as a scene of wretchedness and sorrow. But this argues both injustice and ingratitude. Think how many weeks, and months, and years, you have passed in health, and ease, and comfort; how many pleasurable feelings you have had; how many friends you have enjoyed; how many blessings of various kinds you have tasted; and you will be constrained to acknowledge that you

have much more abundant cause for thanksgiving than for complaint. How merciful *in comparison with those of others*. Your affliction can scarcely be so great, but you may discover among your fellow creatures some whose sufferings exceed your own. You have lost part of your substance ; but they have lost all. You have buried one of your children ; but of their's not one is left to stay the tide of sorrow. You have days, perhaps months, of dreariness and solitude ; they spend their days in groaning, and their nights in anguish. Can the review of such a distinction fail to inspire, not only submission, but consolation ? How merciful in their *alleviation*. The evils we suffer are never without some mixture of good. As there is no condition on earth of pure unmixed felicity, so there is none so miserable as to be destitute of every comfort. Do you mourn the loss of some beloved friend ? are there not others remaining from whom you may expect much comfort ? Is your body afflicted ? have you not reason to be thankful that your mind continues vigorous and entire ? Are you poor and despised ? but have you not the favour and enjoyment of God ? and can he be despicable who is favoured with the special friendship of the sovereign Majesty of the universe ? Can he be miserable, or destitute, who hath the Lord for his portion, who enjoyeth the fountain of all happiness, and who hath the light of God's countenance to cheer him, and the consolations of the divine Spirit to comfort and refresh him ? Have you lost your worldly substance ? still you have the assurance of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." "I one day," says Mr. Newton, "visited a family that had suffered by a fire, which had destroyed all the house and the goods. I found the pious mistress in tears. I said, 'madam, I give you joy.' Surprised, and ready to be offended, she exclaimed, 'what! joy that all my property is consumed?' 'I give you joy that you have so much property that no fire can touch.' This checked

the tide of grief, and she wiped away her tears, and smiled like the sun shining after an April shower." How merciful also, as to *the manner in which they have approached us*. We have not beheld the whole scene of human life at once. Its sorrows have not burst forth upon us in their combined and aggravated form : God hath not suffered us to be tried beyond what we were able to bear ; and in all cases our sufferings have been mitigated by the promise of divine assistance and support.

Another source of consolation is *the contrast which exists betwixt the different tendencies of prosperity and adversity*. Prosperity elates the mind to a degree altogether unsuited to our dependence and our guilt ;—affliction mortifies and abases it. It is when we have all and abound, that we are apt to forget and deny God ;—it is in trouble we say, "it is the Lord ;" as the first impressions of superior agency are supposed to have been derived not from the splendour of summer, or the plenty of autumn, but from the tempest and the earthquake, the thunder and the pestilence. Prosperity contributes to the indulgence of our carnal passions and appetites ;—poverty, by the restrictions and pains it imposes, checks and mortifies them. Prosperity enervates and unfits us for exertion and for trial ;—poverty is a school in which we learn fortitude and patience : it is by its discipline that these graces are exercised and strengthened, as the mountain oak hardens to the blast, and gathers firmness from the storm which threatens its existence. Prosperity induces selfishness ; the young man, who had large possessions, refused to part with them to feed the poor, though treasures in heaven were to be the recompense of his sacrifice :—affliction teaches sympathy ; it gives us the experience of a sufferer's heart, and this impels us to shed the sympathetic tear, to dry the weeping eye, to sooth the throbbing breast, and to contribute to the happiness and welfare of men. Prosperity conceals from us our

spiritual wants, as the Laodiceans, who, when rich and increased in goods, fondly presumed that they stood in need of nothing, whereas God pronounced them to be "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;"—adversity, by shewing us our destitution and helplessness, causes us to have recourse to the consolations, the hopes, and the supports of religion. To the poor was the gospel originally preached, and by the poor it is still most cordially embraced. Prosperity is an opiate to the conscience;—affliction rouses it from its lethargy, causes it to connect suffering with guilt, and thus to place our sins before our face. Prosperity draws the soul from God;—affliction recalls to duty those whom the bounty of providence could not keep in the ways of the Lord. Prosperity is the sultry heat that generates disease;—affliction the storm that purifies the atmosphere. Prosperity is the unruffled deep, and the gentle breeze, when a novice may guide the vessel; it is the time of peace, when the coward may boast;—but adversity is the tempest, and the conflict, where skill and courage are put to the test. Prosperity induces an abhorrence of death: O! how bitter is the thought of death to a man who is at ease in his possessions, who is living in the sunshine of worldly ease and enjoyment;—adversity causes us to regard it as a welcome retreat from toil and suffering; as the haven where the tempestuous voyage is to terminate; the home where the exile is to find a recompense for his privations and woes.

In the contrast thus drawn, it is not meant to be insinuated, that they whom providence blesses with prosperity do always abuse its bounty, and render it subservient to their spiritual injury. The guilt of the rich man in the gospel did not consist in his possessing wealth, any more than the salvation of Lazarus depended merely upon his poverty and disease. The grace of God is not confined to any condition or rank in life: it is limited to none;—it can sanctify all. But, from the effects

which have been described, we are taught the salutary nature of those adverse dispensations of which we are so prone to complain. Like children we wish for every indulgence, regardless of the good or evil which may be produced. Thus wealth and prosperity are viewed as alone desirable, and affliction is dreaded as the greatest evil. 'Alas! "who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" Were we permitted to climb the height to which we aspire, perhaps it would only be a prelude to a fall, from which we might never arise. Let us learn then to consider the afflictions of life as the merciful visitations of heaven.

The great and precious promises of the gospel supply us with strong consolation. The word of promise is the soul's great comfort in time of trouble. "This," says the Psalmist, "is my comfort in my affliction." The promises are declarative of the nature and will of God. Here, as in a glass, we behold his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. As his holiness shines resplendent in his commands, and his justice in his threatenings, so in his promises we see the manifestation of his goodness, and grace, and bounty. They present us with the full impression of the paternal character of the Deity. They furnish the most convincing evidence that he "is love." The most pathetic language, the most endearing relations, the most tender images, are employed, to convey to us an idea of his goodness. In the time of trouble, therefore, our views of God are to be regulated, not by the fears and perplexities of our minds, but by the revelation he has thus made of himself. The promises are also declarations of God's will and purposes towards those who seek him; and they are made in a manner suited to our diversified conditions and wants. They all proceed from the same fountain of grace, but are branched out into innumerable streams, to meet our varied necessities. There is no condition in which we can find ourselves for which there is not some appropriate promise suited to our case.

The word of God not only abounds in general announcements of divine compassion, but also in particular assurances to persons in peculiar circumstances.

Are you trembling under a sense of guilt and danger, and are you walking in spiritual darkness? how encouraging the divine promise, "thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Here is the assurance of forgiveness. O! joyful tidings! If sin is pardoned, affliction and death have nothing in them to excite alarm. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law," in all its awful curses; "but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Reconciled unto God through the death of his Son, enemies are rendered beneficial, afflictions salutary medicines, and death an eternal gain.

Are you discouraged by a sense of weakness? how reviving the assurance, "fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." Having these promises, every afflicted christian may say with Paul, "I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all my tribulations."

Are you alarmed by the approach of danger? "Call upon me," says God, "in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee,

and thou shalt glorify me." This blessed promise denotes a double deliverance; a deliverance in trouble, and a deliverance out of it. If God does not immediately put an end to the afflictions of his people, yet they shall have his gracious presence, and his effectual support; he will take notice of their sorrows, and know their souls in adversity;—he will visit them and comfort them;—he will take their part, and maintain their interests; and this shall be in answer to prayer. And if God proportion our strength to the degree and continuance of our trouble,—if he keep us from offending him by impatience and discontent, and make death at last a discharge from all our sorrows, then his promise is faithfully fulfilled.

Are you suffering from disappointment, or neglect, or loss of friends? still there are promises suited to your case. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Are you in sickness? "The Lord will strengthen you on the bed of languishing; he will make all your bed in your sickness."

Are you in poverty? "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them."

Are you aged and infirm? "Even to your old age I am he, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made and I will bear; even I will carry and deliver you."

Are you suffering from slander and reproach? "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be

ye afraid of their revilings, for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."

O the exceeding great and precious promises of God! O the all-sufficient provision he has made "for all time of our tribulation, and all time of our wealth, for the hour of death, and for the day of judgment!" Recollect, these promises are to all who seek their accomplishment with their whole heart. God is faithful; nor can his word fall to the ground. These promises, too, are addressed to us in all their fulness. They shew us that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God, which we are called to prove and experience for ourselves. Who shall be moved from his steadfastness, that can lay hold of these promises, and stay himself upon them? for just in proportion as we can do this, we shall possess our souls in patience; we shall "abound in hope," and be "joyful in tribulation."

The history of good men in every age, who have suffered the same afflictions with ourselves, furnishes a source of comfort;—an argument which St. James urges in the following words; "take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." These instances shew us that "no strange thing hath happened unto us;" and that the most pious and approved saints have often been the most afflicted. Afflictions, therefore, however long and painful, are not the marks of God's displeasure. Time would fail to enumerate the individual instances of suffering that occur in the Old Testament history; we are, however, presented with a summary of them in the Epistle to the Hebrews; "they had trials of

cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment : they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword ; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins ; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy) : they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." In all these troubles they were more than conquerors through faith ; that faith which is " the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." " They were tortured, not accepting deliverance " upon terms which conscience could not approve of, " that they might obtain a better resurrection." While out of weakness they were made strong, in the strength of God and in the power of his might. Nor was the divine procedure with regard to the people of God changed under the dispensation of the gospel. We find the saints undergoing the same discipline, exhibiting the same constancy, supported by the same influence and the same hope. " I think that God hath set forth us, the apostles, last as it were appointed unto death ; for we are a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place ; and labour, working with our own hands : being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat ; we are made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things unto this day." " But blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort ; who comforteth us in all our tribulations ; for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; alway bearing about in the body the dying of our Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body,

Knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus. For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day ; while we look not at the thing which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen, are temporal, but the things which are not seen, are eternal."

Let the afflicted then survey attentively the church of God "whose names are written in heaven." "These are they who have come through great tribulation." Here are the patriarchs and prophets of old ; here are the disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ ; here is the noble army of martyrs ; here are all who, though poor and obscure and mean while on earth, now "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father ;" they bear their united testimony that it is "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." Nothing has yet befallen you but what is common to men. You have not resisted unto blood as they did. The ordinary distresses of life almost lose the name of evils when contrasted with the sufferings which they underwent. Yet, though men of like infirmities and passions with ourselves, "through faith and patience they now inherit the promises." Our path lies in the same direction. Be you therefore a follower of them. You have the same promises to cheer you in the way, the same Spirit to be your comforter, the same God for your father, the same Mediator for your friend, and the same heaven in prospect for your home. The contemplation of their example cannot fail to dispel every desponding thought, to inspire confidence and hope, and to call forth the language of submission, and even of joyfulness. "Surely," says the consoled sufferer, "if any thing had been better and more conducive for the salvation of man than suffering, God would certainly have shewn it, and have conducted his servants in that way to glory. But his choicest servants have passed through much tribulation,

and happy are they, who with them are made perfect through suffering. Willingly and thankfully, therefore, O heavenly Father ! do I embrace those trials of my faith and patience. I accept them as tokens of thy love, and look with pleasure to my fellow sufferers, who have preceded me."

" Must I be carried to the skies,
In flowery beds of ease,
Whilst others struggled for the prize,
And sail'd through bloody seas ?"

Consider *affliction does not forbid our enjoyment of God.* We are too prone to think that affliction and enjoyment are incompatible. But what though we are deprived of the enjoyment we had in health, in our family, in our active and useful exertions, in the good things of providence, or in life itself ? our principal comfort still remains. Affliction may promote the enjoyment of God, and by possessing him, all that is amiable and excellent in the creature may be enjoyed in a manner incomparably better than in the creatures themselves. His infinite goodness can supply all our wants, satisfy all our desires, allay all our sorrows, conquer all our fears. One beam of his countenance can revive the spirit amidst the darkest scenes of outward trouble. What loss can make a christian poor, whose treasure is in heaven ? What danger can render him anxious, whose " heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord ? " What disaster can rob him of happiness, whose enjoyment is in God ? What death can destroy him, whose " life is hid with Christ in God ? " Deprive him of all the contents of the world, yet in God he possesses all things ; and by communion with him, heaven descends into his soul, or he ascends to heaven, where God is all and in all. Divine joy is not deferred until our entrance into the celestial world ; there it is purified, freed from all alloy ;—enlarged, to the utmost extent of the soul's capacity ;—perpetuated, without

interruption and without end ; but it begins here. The believer has earnest and foretastes ; he knows, by happy experience, that "the Lord is good," and that "blessed is the man that trusteth in him." No creature can be a substitute for him, but he is more than a substitute for every creature ; and his presence can illumine, and cheer, and fertilise, the gloomiest desert. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope ; and she shall sing there." So the prophet found it ; hence he exclaims, "although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall ;" yet he adds, amidst this scene of fearful and extreme destitution, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." So the apostles found it. They had been punished with stripes, thrust into the innermost dungeon, and their feet fast made in the stocks, but God was with them, and his presence diffused light and joy, so that they sang praises to him at midnight. So Spilsbury found it. He had been imprisoned for conscience sake, and was arrested with a view to his being confined a second time. As his wife and children stood weeping around him, he said to them, "I am not afraid of going to prison now, for I found God there the first time." And the same thing has been experienced by thousands of suffering saints, both in life and in death. One of these, who had devoted himself to the cause of God in foreign lands, as he lay upon his death bed, was reminded by a friend of the darkness of the valley of death: "Oh!" said the dying saint, "it is not dark ; it is all light, for Jesus is with me." We need not repine at the loss of the stream, if we can have access to the fountain ; or of the glimmering taper, if we can have the clear light of day. How sublime is the

exclamation of Doddridge, but it is founded on reason and truth ; make it, christian, whatever threatens, your own :

If thou, my Jesus, still art nigh,
Cheerful I live, and cheerful die;
Secure, when mortal comforts flee,
To find ten thousand worlds in thee.

Contemplate as a source of consolation, *the sufferings of your Lord and Saviour*. He, whom we follow, was eminently a sufferer. As he stooped to assume our nature that he might expiate our guilt, so, that he might give us an example of patience, resignation, and fortitude, he subjected himself to a condition of poverty, reproach, and degradation. He shut himself out of a thousand enjoyments, and became acquainted with inexpressible sorrow. The bread of affliction was his food, and he drank of the cup of bitterness. He was beyond all expression, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." If we trace his footsteps, from the manger to the cross, we can scarcely discover any thing that could yield him comfort. In general, those who attach themselves to a great leader, take an interest in following him through scenes of trial, participating in his difficulties and disasters ; especially if they expect to be associated with him on the completion of his undertaking, and to review in his presence the history of their struggles and achievements : having been exposed to the same hardships, they may hope to receive the tokens of special endearment. Such is the prospect held out to the suffering christian. From the height of that glory to which the Saviour is exalted as the reward of his debasement, he calls, saying, "him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with me on my throne ; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne." Are you in a situation to which these words are applicable ? then remember that there is but one way by which you can reach the crown ; and

will you complain, when in this path you see Christ, the Captain of your salvation, going before you? Was he made perfect through sufferings, and shall you think it hard to be perfected by the same process? Shall you be dissatisfied if the Eternal Father treats you even as he treated his well-beloved Son? Would you reign with Christ, and not suffer with him? Can the common soldier complain, when he sees the commander enduring the same privations with himself? Should we not rather rejoice in this identity of experience,—this sameness of discipline, with the Son of God? Should not the servant rejoice to be treated as his master? and the disciple, to be dealt with as his Lord? But, ah! what are your sufferings compared with his? Are you poor?—the Son of man had not where to lay his head. Are you in pain and sorrow?—behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger. Are you deserted and forsaken?—in the hour of his extremity all his disciples forsook him and fled. Are you reviled and reproached?—he was reviled as “a gluttonous man and a winebibber; a friend of publicans and sinners.” Are you oppressed?—see him carrying a cross infinitely heavier; carrying it for you; carrying it without a groan. Oh! can you reflect upon the extremity of his woes; upon the manner in which he endured them; upon the motive which induced him to suffer; upon the happy and glorious termination of his sorrows; upon the great and precious promises which are given to those who suffer with him, and not be inspired with cheerfulness, thankfulness, and resignation? Oh! “consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Consider *the brevity of your affliction*. That misery is indeed insufferable, that burden oppressive, that pang severe, upon which the awful character of eternity is impressed. Ah! who can tell what is meant by a grief which shall never end,

—a burden that shall never be removed,—sighs that must for ever breathe,—tears that must for ever flow? yet this is the affliction, this is the sorrow of the world; for what have they to cheer their drooping spirits, to sustain them beneath the pressure of their woes? If the day be stormy, have they a sun to gild the evening hour? and if tears have been their food through life, will they cease to flow at death? no! they have no hand to wipe away all tears from their eyes,—no light to chase away the gloom; but death absorbs every ray of hope which in happier days might have gleamed at intervals upon the scene, and plunges them into a midnight of black and unmingled despair. But the duration of a christian's woes, the bible assures us, is limited to time, while the prospect of his joy is boundless as eternity. Yes, O believer! there is hope in thine end; a hope that cannot make ashamed. Thy release from sorrow is as sure as the purpose, the covenant, the oath of God, can make it. That end too is near; “for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” If your days are evil, it must be no small consolation to know that they are few in number;—that if the road you travel is rugged and uneven, you shall soon arrive at your journey's end;—that if your voyage is beset with tempests, you have got the haven at least in view;—that if the conflict is severe, its very severity will accelerate its termination;—that

“ The rougher the blast, the sooner 'tis past,
 The tempests that rise
 Will gloriously hurry your soul to the skies; ”—

that, if the burden be oppressive, you shall presently be permitted to lay it down honourably, to take it up no more for ever;—that if your present existence be full of weariness and sorrow, the issue must be well, and the consummation glo-

rious. When a few years are come, you will go the way of all flesh, and then, all that disquiets or distresses you, will be thrown amongst the old things that shall be passed away, to be no more seen. It may be much less. Perhaps a few months,—a few weeks,—a few days more, and all will be peace, quietness, and assurance for ever. Were you doomed for thousands, or even for hundreds of years, to dwell in a body of death, and in a world of danger, the melancholy prospect might well inspire despondency; but, blessed be God! it is otherwise determined. The language of scripture on this subject is remarkable, and calculated to encourage us. It does not speak of the saint's sufferings by using the words ages, years, or even months, lest such terms should bring darkness upon our minds; we read of a day of adversity,—a night of affliction,—an hour of temptation,—a moment, a short moment of distress: be patient then till the hour of release shall arrive. Would it not be strange for a peasant to murmur at the inconveniences of his poor straw-thatched cottage, if to-morrow he were to exchange it for a mansion? What can be more certain than the speedy and blessed end of affliction to those that are in Christ Jesus? Therefore, the humble believer, while all things are withering around him, may sing in his pilgrimage,

“ A little while, and then my race is run,
My toils are ended, and my conflicts done;
For, looking in the glass from day to day,
I seem to trace the progress of decay,
That slowly wears this mortal frame away.
And (though not unrefresh'd by sacred song,
Murmur'd by angel's hosts that round me throng)
Here on life's rugged path I creep along.
Feeble and faint,—alone and friendless too,
A weary traveller, but with home in view.
Then welcome trial, whatever may befall,
That home will more than make amends for all.

And with the sweet assurance it is mine,
 Let but some glimmering of its glory shine
 On my rough road, and I will not repine,
 But with the everlasting arms beneath,
 Still struggle forward to my latest breath ;
 When weak, then strong to conquer hell and death :
 For he that hath redeem'd me with his blood,
 Shall set me safe before the throne of God."

Consider also *the glorious termination of affliction*. O christian! fix your attention on the prospect before you. It is through "much tribulation you must enter the kingdom," but an entrance there will abundantly compensate for all; and what can prevent your entrance there, if you continue steadfast in your determination to glorify God? Fix your eye therefore, on the promised recompense of reward; contrast the present with the future;—what you now endure, with what you shall hereafter enjoy; think how little the one, how great the other;—how short the one, how lasting the other. Endeavour to estimate the salvation that is to be revealed; take its dimensions; survey it in the length and breadth thereof;—employ the telescope of scripture, and the eye of faith. It stretches out beyond the most enlarged conceptions. If the sum total of worldly bliss were to become the possession of one man, and were all concentrated in his experience, that man would be poor, abject, and miserable, in comparison of him who holds the lowest place in the kingdom of heaven. It is nothing less than "a far more, exceeding, and eternal weight of glory." What a delightful termination of a few years of transitory suffering. "What thoughts," said one of the martyrs, "shall we have of the sufferings of this life, when we have reigned with Christ a thousand years in heavenly glory." It is easy to imagine what thoughts we shall then have, but ought not such thoughts to occupy our minds now? "I reckon," said the

apostle Paul, "that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." And of the primitive christians it is said, that they had such joyous anticipations of paradise, and their minds were so intently fixed upon its glories, that they could scarcely think or speak of any thing else. The kingdom! the kingdom of heaven! was so much the subject of their converse, that it became the occasion of misrepresentation, suspicion, and accusation; and many of them were, in consequence, charged with treasonable designs against the government. They were accustomed to regard every day spent on earth as a day lost in heaven; and so eager were their desires of future glory, that many for its sake even coveted martyrdom itself. "Being inflamed," saith Justyn Martyr, "with the desire of a pure and celestial life, we breathe after an intimate converse with God, the great parent and creator of the world, and make haste to seal our confession with our blood." Reader, if the grace of God hath made thee a partaker of the hope of heaven, draw comfort from that hope; anticipate that heaven; daily cherish the thought of its felicities, and set them against the trials you are called to endure. They are real;—they are near;—they are your's. Let your souls

" Go out in strong desire,
The perfect bliss to prove."

Does the sailor, tossed by storms, long once more to reach his home? Does the sick man desire health,—the prisoner liberty,—the condemned criminal a pardon? and should you not desire heaven as the termination of a tedious voyage—as a deliverance from disease, and bondage, and suffering? Live therefore, with the prospect of heaven ever in your sight; endeavour to catch each day a nearer view of its glories, to form a clearer comprehension of its bliss, to acquire more and

more of an holy abstractedness from earthly entanglements and cares, and of preparation for celestial occupations and enjoyments ; elevate the eye of your faith to the blessed and important hour when you shall enter triumphant into the realms of bliss, and shall receive the crown of glory from the hands of an applauding Saviour. So shall the prospect repress the sigh of sorrow, dry up the tear of grief, and cause you to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

THE BLESSED RESULTS OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

How gracious and how wise
Is our chastising God!
And, O, how rich the blessings are,
That blossom from his rod!

He lifts it up on high,
With pity in his heart;
That every stroke his children feel,
May life and peace impart.

Dear Father, we consent
To discipline divine,
And bless the pangs that make our soul
Still more completely thine.

**"NOW NO CHASTENING FOR THE PRESENT SEEMETH TO
BE JOYOUS, BUT GRIEVOUS: NEVERTHELESS, AFTERWARD IT
YIELDETH THE PEACEABLE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO
THEM WHICH ARE EXERCISED THEREBY."**

HEBREWS, XII., XI.

PHILOSOPHERS have frequently remarked what they have called the doctrine of compensation, by which they mean that tendency there is in nature to keep all things on a kind of equality, so that while on the one hand there are defects to counterbalance advantages, there are on the other advantages to counterbalance defects. The remark is applicable, not only

to the natural, but also to the religious life of man ; and if, as a christian, he is subject to tribulation,—if events are perpetually arising to remind him that this is not his rest,—though in his progress to eternal life he finds himself opposed, and tempted, and tried, yet his heavenly Father hath ordained that “ tribulation shall work patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart ; ” and that his afflictions, though for the present not joyous, but grievous, shall contribute to the gradual improvement and ultimate perfection of his moral character. Were we to view affliction by itself, and without reference to its results, it would necessarily appear a very dark and mysterious part of divine providence. Physical evil, apart from its moral uses, cannot be an object of pleasing contemplation to any rational being in the universe ; but, in connection with these uses, it may be one of the brightest manifestations of divine wisdom, and one of the clearest proofs of his comprehensive benevolence. God visits us with affliction, that “ by the sadness of the countenance the heart may be made better ; ” and, just in proportion as moral improvement and perfection are superior to sensual enjoyment and worldly prosperity, in the same proportion ought our gratitude for the benefits conferred, to exceed our sorrow for the suffering inflicted. And when God becomes so great in our eyes, and all created things so little, that we reckon nothing as worthy our aims and ambition but a serious participation of the divine nature, and the exercise of divine virtues—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, and the like, as forming the true felicity and dignity of man, then shall we be prepared to value whatever promotes this end, however painful it may be in itself. That the general design of all the afflictions with which any of God’s people are visited is their progressive sanctification and final perfection, is evident from the whole scope and tenor of scripture ;

and that it is not only a sovereign but a suitable remedy, and every way adapted to accomplish the purpose for which it is intended, is demonstrated by the experience of all who have been exercised thereby. This will be rendered apparent by an examination of some of the advantages resulting from sanctified affliction to those who are the subjects of divine grace. Among these is

The discovery of unsuspected sin. It is by gradual, and often by slow advances, that the christian becomes acquainted with the hidden corruptions of his heart. The first discoveries of sin relate more to the transgressions of his past life, than to the sin that dwells within him ; and often for a long time much of this remains concealed and unsuspected, until the awakening influence of affliction calls it forth. Next to the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit, nothing so effectually develops the deceitfulness and iniquity of the heart, as that change of circumstances which calls forth latent energies, unveils deceptions, and makes our principles distinct and prominent. It is with the view, therefore, of stirring up the hidden mass of pollution that is concealed in the deep recesses of our hearts, that affliction is in many cases appointed. God needs not the experiment for his information ; no part of our corruption is hid from the eye of the heart-searching God with whom we have to do. He sees it in its various hiding places. That is a remarkable passage in Jeremiah, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; who can know it ? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." But the evil must be disclosed to ourselves. The remaining pride, and unbelief, and sloth, and carnality, which exist within us, must be laid open and exposed. Now how is all this to be done, but by appropriate discipline—such discipline as God sees proper to employ ? He superintends every part of our spiritual

education ; and though he loves us with more than a father's heart, yet he cannot withhold what he sees to be necessary for our good. Knowing, as he does, that sin is the chief hinderance to the peace of his people, and that, consistently with the righteousness of his government, he can only make them happy by making them holy ; it is in the very faithfulness of his love, and in the tenderness of his solicitude, that he endeavours to unveil, though by the stern hand of affliction, the evils which excite his displeasure, and the operation of which must necessarily tend to retard their spiritual growth, and endanger their final salvation. Would he act consistently with his spiritual character, were he to do otherwise ? Had you a beloved child, in whom you observed the development of some wayward temper, or indications of some vicious propensity ; which would be most in unison with parental affection, to allow the sinful propensity to spread unchecked, until it involved him in remediless misery, or to chasten and correct the child, and thus to eradicate the root of bitterness ere it attained unconquerable strength and vigour ? And when God sees in his people some sinful passion, some hidden corruption, unsuspected by them, would he act the part of a father, did he not interpose his authority, and assume the firm tone of paternal rebuke ? Could he be the God of love to us, and allow it to spread its baneful influence unchecked ? When he sees some poison plant shooting up in his garden, ought he to leave it there to vegetate until it brings forth fruit unto death ; or tear it up by the roots, though in doing so, the fibres of the heart, round which it hath twined itself, should be made to bleed at every pore ? When he detects some leprous spot on the soul which we cannot see, ought he to permit it to spread until it hath infected the whole spiritual frame ; or cut it out, though in doing so, he must inflict the most exquisite pain ? When he sees the existence of dross, which mars the beauty of our character, and prevents us from

reflecting, with purity and splendour, the glories of his own image, ought he to allow it to remain, or subject us to the operation of the furnace, though in doing so he may occasion the destruction of some darling scheme or enjoyment? Can you hesitate for a moment in determining which God should do? Such is the benevolent purpose for which affliction is employed. Its operation may be painful for the present, but the motive is gracious, and the result is most beneficial.

In our attempts to do good, and to promote the interests of Zion, we have, perhaps, enjoyed in a high degree the confidence and esteem of others, until, by insensible degrees, we have become proud of our reputation; it hath become an occasion of self-complacency, and we have ceased to give glory to God, who alone maketh us to differ. What is to be done? To check this over-weening tendency, some Shimei is permitted to curse us, and make us vile in the sight of others. Our enemies may not speak the truth, but they may serve to remind us of it, and the poignancy of our sufferings under their false aspersions, may discover to us, what before we were ignorant of, how proud we have been of our character and reputation. Or, we have been indulged, perhaps, with a long course of temporal prosperity, until the dross of worldliness has begun to encrust and sully the purity of our christian character. We have become elated by our possessions,—have lost much of the simplicity of our former aims, in an anxious attention to matters of mere worldly consideration. A spirit of display in dress, in furniture, in entertainments, has begun to indicate an attachment to the pomps and vanities of this life; yet the secret is hid from us by a sophistry which we are not disposed to scrutinise or unravel. What is to be done? Affliction must make known the evil; our property must be blighted; the objects of our vanity must be wrested from us, or turned into occasions of humiliation and sorrow; and when the gracious purposes of God's love are accom-

plished ;—when the hidden chambers of imagery have been diligently searched with the candle of the Lord, and all their long neglected and accumulated defilements brought to light, and swept away ;—when the plague spot has been cut out, and the spiritual system is restored to health and soundness ;—when the idol has been cast down, and God reigns in unrivalled sovereignty in the heart ;—when the sullyng dross of worldliness has been purged away, and the Redeemer's image is seen reflected, with beautiful distinctness, in the purified soul ; then, however painful may be the affliction by which these beneficial results have been effected, how strikingly does it display both the wisdom and the goodness of God : and where is the individual, whose afflictions have been thus sanctified, that can fail to look back on the most painful of them all, not only without one sentiment of rebellious regret, but with the deepest emotions of gratitude and admiration ; or that will cease to regard it as one of the most powerful instruments of good in the hands of his heavenly Father, and one of the most precious privileges of his people.

Communion with God. This is one of the most exalted privileges of the christian, and furnishes an astonishing display of the condescension of Jehovah. “ Truly our fellowship,” says an apostle, “ is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” What a stupendous thought ! the infinite, the eternal, the incomprehensible Jehovah, the high and lofty One that inhabiteth the praises of eternity, deigns to admit man, feeble and unworthy man, to communion with himself ! To say that this communion involves no mystery, would be to oppose the direct testimony of scripture ; and to reject this truth, because it is mysterious, would be as absurd as to deny that in God we live, and move, and have our being, because we do not perceive, and cannot comprehend, the mode of our existence in him. Communion with God, however inexplicable in its nature, discovers its reality by its effect.

This effect is a holy love occupying the heart, and regulating all its affections and desires. It is directed to God as able to satisfy its intense and boundless longings after bliss. It delights to dwell on his character, to converse with him through the medium of his works and word;—it rejoices in submission to his will;—it relies with confidence on his strength;—it trusts implicitly on his promises;—it longs to be the humble but cheerful instrument of carrying into effect, within its own limited sphere of action, the purposes of his wisdom and grace. The believer, under the influence of this love, often soars to heaven on the wings of delightful contemplation, and becomes absorbed in the view of the riches of the goodness of God through a crucified Redeemer. He is lost in holy admiration of the wisdom and love displayed in the great scheme of redemption. He remembers, too, by what a price he was bought, and by whom it was paid; and, actuated by fervent gratitude, he exclaims,

“ Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a gift by far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.”

Jesus appears to him to be the chief among ten thousand, and “altogether lovely.” Christ dwells in his heart by faith, and being rooted and grounded in love, his unceasing prayer and endeavour is, to be enabled “to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that he may be filled with all the fulness of God.” Such is the result of fellowship with God, when duly cherished and maintained. It is the principle, the very heart’s blood of the believer’s spiritual life, nourishing and animating the whole process of his growth in grace. It beats in every pious breast. But

its impulse is often checked, and sometimes altogether suspended, by remaining corruption, and the influence of temptation. The danger of our present condition consists chiefly in our affections being estranged from God, and given to the creature; and in our tendency to forsake the fountain of living waters, and to hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. The connection between attachment to the creature and alienation from God is so intimate and sure, that the one infallibly follows the other. Now when the affections thus begin to wander, and the creature interposes to interrupt our communion with himself, God's method of recovering us is, either by removing the favourite object from our reach, or smiting it with a curse. In one way or other he shatters our favourite cistern, with the view of recalling our thoughts and affections to himself, as our chief good and satisfying portion. Thus, for example, a man of ardent affection has allowed his heart to be estranged from God by an undue attachment to the endeared partner of his bosom, and the lovely pledges of their mutual affection:—though amiable is his kindness to them, yet they engross, in part, that regard which belongs only unto God. Thus spirituality has in consequence been impaired, and the exercise of communion with God has been in a great measure absorbed in assiduous attentions to the creature. Because he will not admit of a rival in our affections, God takes away the desire of his eyes at a stroke:—he is stunned by the shock of bereavement, but, perhaps, even this is not enough; the tendrils of his affections, thus violently torn from one object, only cling with greater pertinacity to those that remain. These are also smitten and die. Distressing is the bereavement, and desolate indeed is the heart of him who is thus left alone in a wilderness where roses had encircled his path; but now, when the earthly smile which long had poured the sunshine of gladness around his path is seen no more, and the voice

which had sounded as sweet music to his ears is heard no longer, he becomes impressed with the vanity of every thing, save the enjoyment of God as his chief good. He now repairs for happiness exclusively to the fountain of living waters ; and thus he drinks more deeply than ever of a happiness immeasurably superior to the sweetest that has ever flowed into his soul through the purest earthly channel. This example may serve to show the wisdom and goodness of God in our afflictions, and cannot fail to recall to the minds of some the recollection of many incidents in their past life, which at the time were felt to be dark and painful, but on which they can now look as the brightest manifestations of the care and love of their heavenly Father. They may remember many seasons when the spirituality of devotion, and of communion with God, was gradually yielding to the encroachment of earthly objects ;—they may remember some one object which, more than any other, had insidiously gained upon their affections, and by regular but imperceptible advances was dividing their heart with God ; but just at the time when their piety was degenerating into mere formality, and their communion with God was in danger of being completely destroyed, an hand was suddenly put forth, which dashed the ensnaring object from its seat ; and, as they wept over its broken fragments, they were taught the vanity of created good, and that God would not permit them to seek their happiness in that which was unworthy of their nature. With what exquisite beauty is this expressed by the prophet Hosea, where God promises his backsliding church, “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her, and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth.” Can that be otherwise than an advantage which leads us from the scanty rill to the overflowing fountain ;—which raises the soul from earth to heaven, and leads to an exchange of the creature for the Creator.

The growth and improvement of christian graces. It is not unlikely but that afflictions may sometimes be sent with an immediate view to the cultivation of some particular disposition in the mind. However, it is certain that they are always sent for the christian's spiritual advantage in general—an end this, which can only be answered by the improvement of those particular graces which constitute his christian character. Some of them, therefore, I shall particularly specify. Affliction calls forth the exercise of

Faith. Faith is essential to the christian character. Hence the prominent part it bears in every scriptural account of christian experience and duty. But how can there be faith when every thing is clearly seen? Faith, we are told by an apostle, is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” When every thing is agreeable to our wishes, when the sun of prosperity irradiates our path, and earthly blessings are multiplied upon us, how much do we live by sense. In such circumstance the growth of faith, if not altogether suspended, is certainly greatly obstructed. But see the christian when trouble presses hard upon him. See him bereaved, and disappointed; reduced to poverty, and exposed to accumulated trials; as these are sanctified, the power of faith is expanded and exercised, and the heavenly principle is seen rising in splendor, in proportion as his circumstances become increasingly gloomy and depressed. In the absence of creaturely dependencies and supports, he learns to trust entirely in the Lord, and to leave himself wholly in his hands. He walks in darkness, and perhaps sees no light, but though intercepted in his sight, he hears a voice saying, “Fear not.” Faith listens to the voice, and says, “it is the Lord, what cause can I have for fear; his wisdom cannot err; my circumstances are not such as to preclude the interposition of divine comfort and support: whatever evils betide me, his promises remain faithful.” Thus, as faith rises in exercise,

the perturbation of the mind is allayed, and subsides into tranquillity and peace. Circumstances may be what they may, but all murmuring and sorrow under them is gone. Events may threaten what they will, but the anticipative dread, and all the gloomy images which it conjures up, are done away. A new light breaks in upon the mind, and in that light all things are beheld as new. For it is not so much according to outward circumstances that we are happy or distressed, but according to the state of the inward mind. It is not so much what we see, and feel, and experience, as what we *believe*; not so much the thoughts which are produced by things around us, as the *idea* which predominates within us, which constitutes our real condition, and gives the tone to our emotions. How many have been led to tremble at the approach of trouble, and to exclaim, "ah! this will be too much for me; I shall certainly be overwhelmed!" who have afterwards been compelled to look back upon the trial with surprise and shame. Strengthened by the Spirit's might in their inner man, supported and upheld by the arm of an almighty Saviour, they have learned in the trial some of the sweetest lessons, and received some of the strongest demonstrations of the loving-kindness of God.

Patience. What has been remarked in reference to faith is not less applicable to this grace. How is it possible for patience to exist, if there were no difficulties? If every thing were plain and easy, what opportunity would be afforded for the display of those graces which so pre-eminently bear the impress of the Saviour's image, and which form some of the loveliest graces—the finest features of the christian character? If there were no vexatious annoyances, no irritating provocations, there would be no forbearance;—if there were no suffering, there could be no resignation;—if no delays, there could be no submissive waiting: now patience enters into all these, and it must be confessed, that the christian never looks more

lovely, or more impressive, than when he is able to exercise it. See him confined to his solitary chamber by lingering disease. It is a distressing trial to experience either the consuming anguish of racking pain, or restless feverishness; of shattered nerves and sinking strength; of weary days and sleepless nights: to be debarred from all active employment in the service of the master whom we love; deprived of the endearing companionship of those with whom we have delighted to take sweet counsel, and to walk to the house of God in company; and denied the privilege of joining with the great congregation in the exercise of devotion, and seeing our God as we have seen him in the sanctuary. Such a case of affliction seldom fails to excite sympathy: those who visit the sufferer, view him with commiseration, and while they pity his distress, they feel thankful that his trial is not their's: but how good and gracious is the Lord! while he takes away one blessing, he gives another. The sufferer is not so wretched as might be supposed: he has learned patience in his affliction: he submits quietly to the divine will, and calmly waits for deliverance. Hear him saying—"though I mourn, I do not complain. I trust that these sorrows are not the inflictions of avenging justice, but the corrections of fatherly solicitude; and therefore 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait;' I will quietly bear the yoke. I will welcome the chastisement. I will search for the benefits involved in it, and wait the issue which the Lord intends." How pleasing thus to see patience have its perfect work! But such instances as these we cannot witness but in the house of affliction. Such an example of the excellence of religion could not be displayed, if there were no trials. But for these, what a wide field of glory would be lost to the moral world!

Humility. This is one of the principal of christian graces, and enters so essentially into the christian character, that without it religion cannot exist; and to promote its growth,

and to yield to its influence, is a principal part of true wisdom. Divine revelation assigns to it the highest place, and a sort of pre-eminence among the graces of piety,—bestows upon it the greatest commendations,—enforces it by the most powerful motives,—encourages it by the richest promises,—draws it into exercise by the most splendid examples,—and represents it as the brightest jewel in the christian's crown. The more we study that blessed book, the more shall we learn, from almost every line, that humility is the Alpha and Omega of a sinner's faith and hope—the commencing and the crowning grace. The foundation of the whole christian superstructure of hope and holiness is laid in deep humility: the building itself is a beautiful fabric of humility, and all the decorations by which it is ornamented are all the emblems of humility. Yet this is a temper not easily attained. Man is naturally proud, and the more he has, the more he is exposed to danger. Thus his form, his dress, his talents, his wealth, his honours, his connections, often become fuel to feed his pride. But affliction stains his glory, and by discovering to him his insignificance and frailty, tends to mortify and to humble him. By long usage, affliction has been spoken of as a school—a school of salutary discipline—a school of divine institution, for teaching christian holiness, and training up the children of God for their inheritance in heaven. In this school the lessons are accompanied by experiments, and the great Teacher says by facts, as well as by words, “there see what little reason you have to be proud and lifted up. What is health, or beauty, or talent, or prosperity? all are fragile and uncertain; they furnish nothing on which you can either safely rely, or justly boast.” These instructions appeal to the conscience as well as to the understanding. They produce a silence in the mind,—a solemnity of soul,—a softness of heart, that prepares us to receive divine impressions, and that humbles and abases the heart before God. How self abased has the christian felt

while God has in this way shewn him the depravity of his heart,—stripped him of the objects of which he was once elated, or turned his glory into shame. Here, then, we learn the benefit of affliction ; for surely that is a benefit of the highest order which makes us humble, since it is only in such a state we can be truly happy. It is an apparent paradox, though perfectly intelligible to every christian, that humility is the very foundation and fountain of all his most precious hopes, and joys, and consolations ;—that the lower he sinks in the depths of self abasement, the higher he rises in the exercise of christian hope ;—the profounder his convictions of his own nothingness, the sweeter and more abundant are his spiritual joys ;—and that it is when he most fully feels and most freely confesses

“ I nothing have, I nothing am,
Excluded is my every boast,
My glory swallow'd up in shame ; ”

it is then that he most fully feels, and rejoicingly exults, in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

Prayerfulness. A christian is always a praying man. Prayer is an exercise prized highly by his enlightened judgment, and so enjoyed, in many an hour of secret communion with his God, that he would deem the wealth of ten thousand worlds a poor equivalent for the pure and satisfying joys it yields ; but, alas ! how often, notwithstanding, has he to lament over the coldness of his heart, and to exclaim, in the language of the amiable poet of christianity,

“ What various hinderances we meet,
In coming to a mercy-seat.”

How often does he feel astonished to discover in himself a strange reluctance to engage in this sacred exercise ; and

how often do formality and listlessness, a distracted mind and a wandering heart, mar, or rather mar the performance. Frequently is affliction rendered necessary to rouse his energies, and to excite him to fervour. 'This is what God proposes by the trials he appoints: he designs to bring us nearer to himself; it is to quicken us to pray—to pray more frequently, more earnestly. "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early." A man under sanctified affliction will not pray carelessly, but "continue instant in prayer." He will say, with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Thus Paul, in his distress, besought the Lord thrice; and our Saviour, in his agony, prayed three times, saying the same words. And how many among ourselves can testify, that while they were prosperous the spirit of devotion languished in their hearts;—that they had lost, in a great measure, their relish for the exercise of prayer, and were sliding into a state of cold formality; nor did they, although visited occasionally with misgivings, discover the sad extent of their spiritual declension, until affliction forced the conviction upon them. This it was which roused the dying embers in their hearts; this excited them to earnestness and importunity; this caused them to pour out their soul with strong cries and tears unto God: and such was the blessedness which they then enjoyed in communion with their heavenly Father, and such the elevating and sanctifying effect of earnest prayer, that, in these advantages alone, they have found a rich compensation for all the afflictions they had been made to endure.

Equally useful is affliction in promoting *heavenly-mindedness*. A mind habitually impressed with the solemn realities of an eternal state,—raised above the world in holy aspirations after a better and more abiding portion,—seeking to disentangle itself from every tie which would improperly bind

it down to earth, or retard its spiritual progress in a course of preparation for heaven, is one of the characteristics which distinguish the genuine christian. Such a state of mind is not, however, maintained without difficulty, nor is it always displayed with equal clearness and decision. There are few but what have to complain with the psalmist, "my soul cleaveth to the dust;" and especially when they have been long indulged with prosperity. Alas! how difficult is it to live in the world without the world living in us! To enjoy its blessings without committing the error of the bewildered disciple, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us build tabernacles." Here how often is affliction rendered necessary to aid our weakness,—to stir up our nest,—and to direct our thoughts more frequently and fervently to the happiness of heaven. Was it not when the dove could find no resting-place for the sole of her foot amidst the wilderness of waters, that she thought of returning to the ark? and when the deep floods of affliction have spread themselves over our favourite resting-places, and we are driven away from the objects on which we delighted, then are we constrained, by a happy necessity, to turn to the heavenly ark, and made to rejoice in our security and peace. Now, if we glance at some of the chief afflictions with which we are liable to be visited, we shall see that they have all a direct tendency to draw our thoughts and desires heavenward, and the more there is of heaven in our thoughts, the more there will be of heaven in our tempers, conversation, and character; and if, from our thoughts and affections being thus attracted heavenward, our character begins to assume a more heavenly cast, and our conversation a more heavenly tone, ought we not to bless God, and to rejoice in tribulation.

Affliction contributes to *usefulness*. This it does by producing sympathy, that sympathy which arises most powerfully from experience, and which indeed can hardly be pro-

duced without it. The vast and special importance of affliction in this respect, may be partly understood from the cold and deaf ear which those who are in trouble are apt to turn to all exhortations and comforts addressed to them by persons whom they suppose to have had little or no experience in similar trials and afflictions. "Ah!" say they, "you have never been tried in this way; you know not what it is to suffer as I am doing." It is to those who have been exercised like themselves that they approach with pleasure, and whose counsels they listen to with confidence. Let any one sit down by their side, and say, "Ah! my friend, I know what sorrow is; I have tasted of the same bitter cup as yourself;" and instantly the heart is opened to him, from a conviction that here is one who can sympathise and afford assistance—one who can enter into their views, feel their sensations, and weep with them. Thus, by obtaining access to the heart of the afflicted, you are enabled the more effectually to impart instruction, reproof, or comfort, as the case may require.

Affliction also renders us objects of observation. When does a christian most powerfully engage attention to himself? is it when moving onward uniformly in prosperity, and health, and honour; or in suffering, privation, and bereavement? Undoubtedly the latter. Take the histories of Job, and Joseph, and David, and Daniel, and Paul: what is it that gives to them their great and peculiar interest? is it not chiefly that they place their heroes before us in circumstances of severe trial, of heavy calamity, or of sudden and extraordinary reverses of fortune? and is it not this which renders them so instructive and useful? But for this, how insipid would have been the narrative of their lives. Without these shades the picture would have had neither beauty nor effect. How uninteresting too would have been the character of these saints. Some of the most prominent beauties would have

been hid from us, and we should have lost all the advantages arising from the contemplation of their faith and patience, their resignation, meekness, and constancy, and of the efficacy and abundance of the grace of God. Thus the christian often derives his principal glory from the sufferings he endures. Nothing renders his character more impressive and useful. It recommends religion, and it carries along with it a peculiar conviction. When, in a season of distressing calamity, he is seen setting the stamp of sincerity on his former professions, and exhibiting a touching and triumphant display of the faithfulness of his Redeemer, and of the power of his religion in supporting and comforting the soul in every time of trouble ;—when in his whole deportment he is seen to wear the aspect of cheerful submission, equally removed from stoical insensibility, and gloomy despondency ;—when all around see that he can as cordially delight in the service of Christ when bereaved and disappointed, as when indulged and prospered ; when they see that under the pressure of trials such as might bear down the strongest spirit, he can rise above the wave where others sink, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation ;—oh ! must they not be constrained, by such an exhibition of the power of the gospel, to believe in its divine reality ? must they not see that no earth-born principle could produce such consolations and supports ? By the contemplation of such scenes, infidels have been convinced, the wicked have been reclaimed, the weak have been strengthened, and the timid encouraged. I appeal to your own feelings. When you have seen a christian thus suffering, in all the composure and majesty of submission, has not a voice addressed you,

“ Now see the man immortal ; him I mean
Who lives as such : whose heart, full bent on heaven,
Leans all that way ; his bias to the stars.
The world's dark shades in contrast set, shall raise
The lustre more ; tho' bright without a foil ;
Observe his awful portrait, and admire,
Nor stop at wonder,—imitate, and love.”

And oh ! should not this consideration constrain believers rejoicingly and thankfully to embrace the opportunity which affliction affords them of glorifying God and benefitting man ? And if, through the testimony you have been enabled to bear in your sufferings, but one sinner has been reclaimed from the error of his ways—but one wanderer has been led to the possession of the peace of God on earth, and the glory of God in heaven, should you not rejoice in your sufferings, whatever they may have been ?

Seeing then that affliction is so useful to the christian character, the remedy of so many evils, and the occasion of such invaluable benefits, nothing can be more unreasonable than to be displeased when we are visited with it. This is nothing less than being displeased with that which is most needful and convenient for us ;—displeased with a deliverance from the greatest danger ;—displeased with the peace and prosperity of our souls. To be dissatisfied with divine providence for sending affliction is as inconsistent as to be angry with the physician because his medicines are nauseous, when he is assiduously promoting our recovery to health ; or with our surgeon for probing a wound which might otherwise prove fatal to life ;—or with the friend who rouses us from a reverie by a blow, in order to save us from a precipice. A slight acquaintance with human affairs will be sufficient to shew that while many have bitter cause to lament that they have been rich, and prosperous, and applauded, and have received their consolation here ; so many have had equal reason to be thankful that they have been impoverished, bereaved, disappointed, and afflicted, since their temporal poverty has added to their spiritual treasures,—their earthly bereavements have led to the formation of more exalted associations,—their worldly disappointments have caused them to cherish their most exalted hopes, and their present afflictions have contributed to the enlargement of their future and eternal joys.

THE ABUSE OF AFFLICTION.

Man is responsible for ills received !
Those we call wretched are a chosen band,
Compell'd to refuge in the right, for peace.
Amid my list of blessings infinite
Stands this the foremost, "That my heart has bled."
'Tis heav'n's last effort of good-will to man ;
When pain can't bless, heav'n quits us in despair.

" THOU HAST STRICKEN THEM, BUT THEY HAVE NOT GRIEVED ; THOU HAST CONSUMED THEM, BUT THEY HAVE REFUSED TO RECEIVE CORRECTION : THEY HAVE MADE THEIR FACES HARDER THAN A ROCK ; THEY HAVE REFUSED TO RETURN."

JEREMIAH V., III.

It is a lamentable fact, that in many cases the operation of affliction is directly contrary to its intended design. The mind is brought into a worse state by its sufferings than before—the heart is hardened—the spirit is exasperated. Instead of submitting to God, the sinner rushes upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and fights against him. Like Ahaz, of whom it is said, "in his afflictions he sinned yet more and more against God." It was an awful appeal that Jeremiah made to God concerning many of his hearers, "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return." In these

cases we see both the crime and calamity of sinners. They abuse to the most awful purposes what was capable of producing the greatest advantages; the gracious design of heaven is frustrated; and their situation is rendered the more desperate by the very means employed for their salvation. This abuse of affliction is to be traced to various causes.

It arises from *inconsideration*—from a disregard of *divine agency*. Many walk all through life and never meet with God. Whatever occurs, it never leads their minds to him, whether it be pleasing or painful. When they experience a distressing event, they stop at second causes. They are kept from God by the very instrumentality he employs. Is the affliction disease of body? it is ascribed to the influence of heat or cold. Is it loss of property? it is viewed as the result of carelessness, chance, or injustice. Is it loss of reputation? O! they exclaim, it was that false servant,—that perfidious friend,—that malicious enemy. They have no solemn recognition of God's all-disposing government and superintendence,—no thought of the course of events, but as regulated by something which they call general laws, and then blended with chance; or of the afflictions by which they are exercised, but as the exclusive results of what is merely subordinate agency. Thus God is far off—he is not in all their thoughts. They feel none of the dispositions which his dispensations ought to inspire. They remain strangers to all the considerations which tend either to induce repentance and humiliation, or to inspire encouragement and hope. The only circumstances which engage their attention are such as excite angry and bitter passions. The instrument by which they suffer being only seen, it awakens their resentment and provokes their revenge; or, if beyond their reach, their minds sink into a gloomy and sullen despondency.

This inconsideration also regards the *design* of affliction. The evils which God inflicts are as real a part of his provi-

dence as the blessings he bestows. Who may not recognise his gracious arrangement in the appointment of night as well as day—in the storm as well as in the calm—in the frost and snow of winter as well as in the warmth and beauty and fragrance of summer? Afflictions are sent with the same wise and merciful design. For the most part they are castigatory, —to bring us to a sight and sense of our state,—to render sin more evident and odious to us. They operate like the tempest on the ocean. The waters, whilst calm and tranquil, seem clear and transparent; but, when agitated by the storm, they cast up the mire and dirt which had lain stagnant at the bottom. The least affliction, even to the godly, is usually an application of the great physician of souls for the removal of some growing disease: in short, they are deliberate dispensations to lead men to reflect upon their works and ways, to repent of sin, and to return to God. Therefore are we commanded “to hear the voice of the rod, and who hath appointed it.” But it is the nature of man to be stupid and insensible with respect to divine things and divine teaching. God speaks plainly, but he will not hear. God manifested his presence sufficiently to the Israelites in the wilderness, but they were slow in learning that he was ever with them to instruct and to bless them, and that what they suffered or enjoyed proceeded from himself. How little do the world in general look at the design of God in their trials. One man has loved the partner of his bosom, the companion of his soul, who alone gave to life its sweetest enjoyment;—he now deplores her loss, and is ready to throw away his life as no longer of any value. He asks, why God should so blast all his prospects? He sees not that the event was sent to show him that he was setting up his rest in this world, that he was living unmindful of his Creator, and to awaken him to a sense of his error, that he might not be condemned in the day of God. Another has laid his schemes so wisely that he imagines

himself certain of success. He has used all possible precaution, and exercised the utmost care which prudence could suggest; but behold, his schemes do not succeed; disappointments rapidly follow each other; events, totally unexpected, occur and defeat all his designs; he blames this or that purpose, or vents his anger upon outward circumstances. He sees not that God has observed his plans, and has chosen to disappoint them, that he may no longer seek his happiness at broken cisterns, but repair to the fountain of living waters. Another person sets out with high expectations of attaining fame and reputation for talent, or science. His prospects are fair and flattering;—his hopes become daily more sanguine. But, perhaps, a fever interposes, and destroys his capacity for application, and defeats all his expectations. "How cruel," he exclaims, "how cruel the disappointment!" He sees not the hand of a gracious providence, who is thus checking his fond and sanguine hopes, and teaching him that

"This world is not a portion fit for man."

Now when men thus overlook the hand of God in their sorrows,—when they disregard the voice of the rod, and him who hath appointed it,—when it fails to impress their minds,—when they neglect the proper improvement of their afflictions, they become despisers of his grace; and for this reason the scripture compares them to those animals that are the most distinguished for stupidity, to the wild ass's colt—the deaf adder—the silly dove. In this comparison, however, the advantage is on the side of the beast, for its inconsideration proceeds from its natural incapacity, but with man it is the result of wilful and deliberate neglect.

It is the result of *insensibility*. It is the nature of man to be cold and indifferent to the things of God. An alien and an apostate, his is the carnal mind, which is enmity

against God. Sin has thrown around him a thick mantle of ignorance, prejudice, and unconcern. On no other principle can we account for that grievous and perilous insensibility to spiritual and eternal things, which prevails to such an awful extent among the great mass of mankind. They have, in many instances, the bible in their hands ;—they have the ordinances of religion administered among them ;—they have the great truths of revelation, the principles of the everlasting gospel shining in unclouded splendour around them ;—they have the destinies of eternity hovering with awful and mysterious majesty over the scene of their future prospects, to quicken their apprehensions and stimulate their inquiries ;—they have the great teacher death reading his monitory lectures in their ears ;—they have the admonitions of providence warning them from time to time ; and yet we see them advancing along the path of life with all the composure and confidence of total indifference, or of perfect security. They have no vivid and realizing perception—no feeling of their state as sinners—of the evil of transgression—of their need of a Saviour, or of the necessity of repentance and conversion. Thus when brought into affliction, instead of being impressed by the visitation, and turning their attention to the consideration of the nature of their state, or of the design of God, they reason respecting it according to the principles of a worldly philosophy, or seek diversion and solace in worldly pleasures and enjoyments. “ This,” they exclaim, “ is a world of trouble and vicissitude. There is no escape from affliction. It would be folly, therefore, to be much affected by what is common to man. Our duty and our highest wisdom is to bear with patience what cannot be remedied. It is beneath the dignity of man to yield to despondency ; he ought not to be, like the sensitive plant which shrinks beneath every breeze, but rather as the oak that shades the mountain top, and bids defiance to the storm.”

Or, if humanity yields to the pressure, and induces the tear, or wrings forth the cry of distress, yet, it is the mere emotion of nature, unaccompanied by any concern at God's displeasure, any humiliation on account of sin, or any surrender of the heart to the divine government. Hence the world is usually resorted to for consolation. They seek to relieve the disquietude of their minds, to escape from reflection, by fleeing to its society, its pleasures, or its pursuits; and these they employ, as an opiate, to stupify the conscience and benumb the heart. Thus the design of affliction is entirely defeated;—the insensibility of the sinner is promoted by the very mean employed to rouse him from his lethargy, and his state becomes increasingly desperate.

It is the offspring of *pride and malignity*. Pride is the master sin of our nature. Its language is, I will be like the Most High. It is the cursed disposition which expelled angels from heaven, and Adam from paradise. It spurns the restraints and authority of the supreme lawgiver. This is seen especially in the time of affliction. Pride always induces over-weening notions of ourselves and of our pretensions;—it fomented impatience of disposition, creates an extreme sensibility of the smallest inconvenience, and inspires a spirit of insubordination that refuses to be controlled, and which fills the heart with bitterness and resentment when placed under checks and restraints. When, therefore, God afflicts one whose heart is unhumbled under a sense of sin and guilt, like Ephraim, he struggles under the chastisement, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and which refuses obedience to his master's hand. He frets and murmurs—regards himself as the victim of a hard and cruel destiny—looks with dissatisfaction and envy upon those whose condition appears to be more tranquil and prosperous than his own; and, if he thinks of God at all, it is with the spirit of the ancient Jews, who uttered the impious sentiment, and repeated it until it became proverbial, "the ways of the Lord are not equal."

There is also the operation of malignity. There is a passive malignity in all—an indisposition to be wrought upon, to receive impressions from God's hand, or to listen to the dictates of his spirit; but in some it assumes an active form;—their hearts are full of impatience and resentment;—when God chastises they are refractory and rebellious; they endeavor to repel the strokes of his hand. Their hearts are of an anvil temper, made harder by affliction, and reverberate the blow; like the Roman emperor, who, instead of being humbled and alarmed at God's voice, when speaking in thunder, attempted to thunder back again in defiance. All judgments that befall them are as strokes given to wild beasts, which, instead of subduing and taming them, produce a higher degree of fierceness. Like the people of whom Isaiah spake, they say “in the pride and stoutness of their hearts, the bricks are fallen down, but we build with hewn stone; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.” Thus we are presented with the awful spectacle of guilty creatures engaging in war with their Creator. To such “there remaineth nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall consume the adversaries.”

The conduct which has been described, as it is in the highest degree dishonourable to God, so it must prove ruinous to the sinner. God is our father and our sovereign, and it is difficult to conceive in what way we can more extensively dishonour him than by this abuse of affliction, “We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live?” Were you to see a son who had incurred the rebuke, and provoked the anger of a kind and affectionate father, rising up in rebellion against his authority;—snatching the rod out of his hand, and breaking it in pieces;—flying from the house, and refusing to return;—were you to hear him say, “what right hast thou to deal thus with me?

I despise thy strokes, and will do so again." Would you not regard him with horror? Would he not appear a monster rather than a son? What then ought we to think of such conduct when presented to God? Here the sin rises in aggravation and criminality in the same proportion as God is greater than man, and his claims to our gratitude, reverence, and obedience, exceed those which belong to the fathers of our flesh. It cannot therefore go unpunished. Under the law, rebellion after parental correction was a capital crime; it was condemned by statute, and thus the statute runs: "if a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them; then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gates of his place, and they shall say unto the elders of his city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear." In such a case there was no alternative but submission or destruction. And so it is here; resistance is not only unreasonable, but ruinous!

From this abuse of affliction three consequences will be found to arise:—

It will deprive us of all the benefits which God intended to confer by it. These are all comprised in this one word, salvation—a blessing that includes all the riches of grace, and the greater riches of glory; deliverance from sin, death, and hell;—the possession of pardon, peace, holiness, and heaven;—a blessing, in short, immense, infinite, everlasting;—which occupied the mind of Deity from eternity, was procured by the Son of God upon the cross, and which will fill eternity with happiness. O, how little, how insignificant,

are all the objects which inflame the imagination, excite the desires, or awaken the ambition of mankind, compared with salvation. Riches, rank, fame, honour, pleasure, are but as the small dust of the balance, when compared with the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. This salvation is by far too valuable and important to be bestowed on any one who is not in earnest to obtain it, or who does not possess a correspondent temper of mind. The thoughtless, the careless, the rebellious, the impenitent, cannot, in the nature of things obtain it. Those who are invited to its blessings are the humble, the contrite, the broken in heart, those whose spirit is broken down before the Lord; and until this state of mind is experienced, salvation is impossible.

It will induce the Almighty to visit with heavier chastisement. No man can endure either that his love or anger should be despised; and if men despise the chastening of the Lord, will he not visit for these things? "Who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered?" "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker." There cannot be a more certain presage of future misery than to counteract the afflictive dispensations of divine providence. Then the Almighty turns his rod into a scorpion, and fulfills the threatening, "if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me, then will I also walk contrary unto you; and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." Thus the first blow is gentle, it affects the man's property only—a part of his estate is taken away; if he remain unimpressed and unhumiliated, God then bereaves him of a friend, or a relation;—he afterwards enters his house, and takes away a darling child, perhaps a second,—a third;—he next smites the partner of his bosom, the delight of his eyes, and she is made to waste away before him by slow consuming disease;—he then visits him with some bodily affliction; he is laid upon a bed of pain and languishing; he is made to feel in solitude the

extent of his bereavement, and leisure is given him for reflection :—after this he stripes his conscience,—his heart is filled with bitterness,—he has a wounded spirit that he cannot bear,—his life becomes burdensome,—he is afraid to die, and yet sickens at the thought of existence. If in all this he turns not unto God with weeping and mourning, but sins yet more and more, then he casts him into hell with these words, “he that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

Sometimes *God is induced to withdraw the rod, and to say* “Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.” The sinner, perhaps, thinks himself happy in being released from trouble : miserable delusion ! This respite is the harbinger of final ruin. It was an indication of the desperate state of Israel, when God said, “but my people would not hearken unto my voice ; and Israel would none of me : so I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.” These are evidently the words of a father, who having employed all the means which wisdom and love could suggest in order to reclaim a rebellious son, and finding all unavailing, at length determines to give him up to the waywardness of his own heart. When God thus resolves to dismiss a man, and to have no more to do with him, the judgment is most awful. The calm which follows is more dreadful than the fiercest storm. Nothing can be more fatal to the sinner : it is a freedom to sin ; it is the removal of hindrances out of the way of perdition ; and thus giving the unhappy wretch an unchecked passage in his career of folly and disobedience, so that he goes on undisturbed in his iniquities, every day increasing his enmity against God, and increasing God’s enmity against him ; treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. His salvation then becomes hopeless. When the heart is not conquered by affliction, is it likely that worldly prosperity and sensual indulgence will win it over to God ? When the

whip, and the spur, and the discipline of the yoke, cannot tame and subdue the unmanageable animal, will the end be accomplished by suffering him to range undisturbed, whithersoever his inclinations may lead him? A man thus abandoned of God is sure of being ensnared by error, enslaved by lust, and led captive by the devil at his will down to the regions of everlasting woe. That, therefore, which the sinner has to dread above every thing else, is to be left without affliction; for this is the effect of God's deepest displeasure.

Reader, art thou not in danger of this? Many afflictions you have doubtless felt. God hath often spoken to you by the rod; you have had stroke upon stroke, so that it would have seemed impossible for you to stand out. These trials you have doubtless felt, but have you seen the hand of God in them? have you considered that these have formed a part of the discipline and chastening which God, in his infinite mercy, hath been employing for your salvation? have they tended to humble you,—to embitter sin to your taste,—to inspire repentance in the review of your past conduct,—to lead you to seek forgiveness and salvation? or, after all that God has done, are you still thoughtless, insensible, unsubmissive, and rebellious? Then awake, thou that sleepest; cease to weary the Almighty with thy perverseness; dare not, at the peril of thy soul, tempt his long-suffering any longer, lest he be induced to say, "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do thus unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." But canst thou stand before him? "Can thine heart endure or can thy hands be strong, in the days when he shall deal with thee?" How much better to "be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live." Delay then no longer: while God is yet waiting to be gracious; while the compassionate

Friend of sinners still intercedes for thee ; while the ever-blessed Spirit condescends to strive with the hardness of thy heart ; while the affliction thou art enduring furnishes proof that thou art not yet abandoned ; flee, sinner ! flee from thy sins,—thy unbelief,—thy lukewarmness ; flee to Jesus, cast thyself at his feet, and cry with Ephraim, “ thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised ; as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke ; turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God.” Then shall God, as he looks upon your confusion and your distress, as he sees you smiting upon your breast in the bitterness of your sorrow, break forth in mercy upon your disordered soul, like the sun when emerging from some dark and lowering cloud, with the assurance of mercy and grace. “ Is Ephraim my dear son ? Is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : therefore my bowels are troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.”

DEPRESSION OF MIND IN AFFLICTION.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace ;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour ;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

“ IF THOU FAINT IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY, THY STRENGTH
IS SMALL. ”

PROVERBS XXIV., 1.

IN affliction there are two extremes to which we are liable, and against which we are cautioned by an apostle ; “ my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” We are neither presumptuously to brave affliction, nor despondingly to sink under it. In either case, the consequences, as to religion, are most ruinous. Sad, indeed, is the condition of that man, who in the time of affliction gives himself up to gloom and despondency. His mind

becomes like the ocean when tossed by the tempest—it is thrown into a state of confusion, perplexity, and agitation: fretted by anxiety, and alarmed by fear, he dwells with bitter reflections on the miseries he endures,—feeds upon his own melancholy,—and is tempted to curse the day of his birth. Life becomes a burden; he turns away from the voice of christian sympathy, and the counsels of inspiration, for he says “my case is hopeless.” He murmurs and repines,—hardens himself in his sorrow, and cries, “oh! that it would please the Lord to destroy me.” His thoughts rest on those subjects only which tend to torment, and which defeat the end of providential chastisement. Various causes may operate in producing this state of mind, and these require to be distinctly traced, that wherever it exists the sufferer may be guided to its true source.

In some cases it arises *from the remembrance of past sin*. All misery is the effect of sin; it naturally, therefore, reminds us of it. It is for this reason that men so generally regard affliction as the effect of God’s displeasure. The catastrophe at the tower of Siloam led the Jews to conclude that they who perished were sinners above all others in Jerusalem. When the barbarians saw the viper fasten on the hand of Paul, they said among themselves, “no doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” And though we are much more disposed to judge others by this erroneous rule than ourselves, “yet there is something in calamity,” says Madame de Stael, “that tends to make all minds superstitious.” It would have been more correct had she said, that tends to revive the remembrance of a moral providence, and the belief of a connection between sin and punishment. This is more especially the case when afflictions are sudden and unlooked for, when they are heavy and of long continuance, or possess a peculiarity of character. Joseph’s brethren, when they were accused as

spies, and threatened with punishment, said one to another, "we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." Even good men have not always been able to resist such impressions and conclusions. Gideon said, "if the Lord be with us, why then is this evil befallen us?" and the pious widow of Sarephath, upon the loss of her child, said to the prophet, "what have I to do with thee, O thou man of God! art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" The poet tells us, "behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face;" but he does hide it. The frown is visible enough,—sense can see that; but the smile can only be apprehended by faith: there are some, however, whom Bunyan designates "little faith;" though sincere, they are diffident and timorous; their confidence is weak and fluctuating, and they are prone to faint in the day of adversity because their strength is small. But it is in the case of sinners we find the most striking exemplification, particularly when they have gone to great lengths in sin. It is not unusual for such persons, when brought into deep affliction, to regard it as an indication not only of God's indignation, but also of the hopelessness of their state: their past sins are brought to remembrance; they view them under the influence of gloomy and depressed feelings; they dwell upon their number, their aggravation, and desert: perhaps some peculiar sin rests like an intolerable burden upon the conscience. Under the united influence of remorse and despondency they give up all for lost, and conclude that all they suffer is but the presage of still greater woes in the world to come. Thus the heart becomes hardened by despair, and the sinner turns away from all considerations but those which tend to rivet him to his sins, and to keep him from Christ as the saviour of the lost.

With many it is to be ascribed to *the weight and severity*

of their affliction. Perhaps it presents an aspect altogether peculiar, or many troubles meet together, like dark clouds in winter, which by their union quite intercept the rays of the sun. Had it been a common affliction, they persuade themselves they could have borne it; but a calamity so heavy is more than they can bear. They adopt the strong language of Job, as expressive of their own feelings, "oh! that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balance together! for now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." Perhaps this trouble originates in some painful bereavement. The desire of their eyes—the delight of their heart is taken away at a stroke! Perhaps *he* is taken away upon whom their comfort and very subsistence depended. Who is this that sits solitary and dejected? Inattentive to every thing passing around her, she is ruminating on days that are past, and comforts that are lost for ever. She looks forward to mournful hours, to difficulties and dangers. Her face is overcast with gloom, her eyes are red with weeping, her bosom heaves, and she says, "call me not Naomi," that is pleasant, "but call me Mara," that is bitter, "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." It is the newly-made widow. She has lost the support of her life, the joy of her soul. She is left with a numerous family;—she is friendless. Weak and delicate, she is unable to struggle with difficulties; she fears that in a little time sickness, or even death, may overtake her, and then she must leave her children to the world, as poor and helpless orphans. Pitiable case! can we wonder that her spirit is sad, or that her heart bleeds with anguish? Perhaps the affliction is in their worldly circumstances;—they have lost their property—all they had is gone. They are brought down at once to poverty; disappointed in

all their hopes ; unable to meet the imperious demands that are made upon them ; surrounded by a large family looking to them for support ; is it surprising that calamity weighs down their spirits ? Perhaps their trouble arises from their family connections. They are doomed to drag out life with those whose base tempers and whose baser conduct are intolerable. They have to bear the consequences of their imprudences and their crimes ; day by day their prospects become darker, and their trials more difficult to be borne. Perhaps the affliction is a painful and continued sickness : the hand of God is upon the family or upon the person. It is an affliction that deprives them of social comfort, and robs the family of all enjoyment. It is sometimes exceedingly painful and alarming. Means of every description have been used without effect, and now they have only to say, " this is our affliction, and we must bear it." In all these cases it is easy to observe the direct influence of affliction upon the mind. It is not a sin to feel the pain which it inflicts, for then must the sufferer be something more or less than man. The degree of sorrow is allowed to be proportioned to the degree of affliction ; but when sorrow militates against the salvation of the soul—when it causes us to omit incumbent duties, or to commit sin by indulging tempers inconsistent with our obligations and circumstances, we ought to remember, that no weight of affliction will justify our conduct, or extenuate our crime.

The strength of our passions is another cause of depression. Far be it from me to intimate that the passions are sinful ; this would be nothing less than to reflect on the infinite wisdom of the Creator, who, for purposes worthy of himself, has implanted them in our nature. Human life, without the kindly influence of the passions would present a cheerless, insipid, and uninteresting scene ; a group of insulated beings destitute of all those feelings which link man to man, and awaken all the pleasures of social life. The endear-

ments and felicity of heaven itself must in a great measure depend on the sanctified exercise of the most refined and exalted passions of the mind. But alas! how often in this, as in other respects, has the merciful bestowment of heaven been abused to purposes the most degraded. How frequently has passion usurped the place of reason, and, having ceased to be the source of happiness, it has become the fruitful occasion of misery. The operation of the passions in this way is seen particularly in circumstances of trouble. They often bid defiance to the dictates of reason and religion, establish a direct opposition between our principles and our practice, and render the man of reflection a wonder to himself. The first principles of religion stand immediately connected with adversity. That the infinitely wise and gracious God governs the world;—that every affliction takes place under his direction;—that in all his dispensations, he is constantly seeking our profit in the promotion of our best and most important interests; and therefore our duty is humble and cheerful acquiescence in all his will, and a firm and stedfast reliance upon his mercy as it is revealed in the gospel: these are our principles. But what is the language of our affections? “Acquiescence? impossible! What! acquiesce in the loss of all my comfort, when I can think of nothing but the dear object that is gone—gone for ever? Acquiesce in severe pain, and the prospect of continued sickness, and unremitting trouble? Had you said, encourage grief,—give way to repining,—foster despondency; then obedience had been easy. And how can this affliction be the result of kindness, when it has withered all my comforts, darkened all my prospects, and when in consequence I shall be compelled to go down mourning to the grave?” So spake Jacob, when grieving for the loss of his children, he exclaimed, “all these things are against me!” So spake Job, when overcome by the bitterness of his grief, he said, “he hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone, and my hope

hath he removed like a tree. He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies." So spake David, at a time when his views were regulated by feeling rather than grace, "will the Lord cast us off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" In each of these cases the sequel showed, how erroneous are those conclusions which are dictated by passion, and how well able God is to render our heaviest afflictions productive of our choicest mercies.

In some cases the cause is *physical*. The potent influence of several morbid diseases of the body upon the mind has been long ascertained, and in the diagnosis of disease, medical men are in the constant habit of regarding different conditions of the mind as characteristic of certain diseases of the body. This need not excite surprise, when we consider how much the operations of the mind affect those of the body. A single night of excessive grief has been known to change the colour of the hair, and to render it white. A sudden burst of passion has occasioned the rupture of a blood vessel, and even of the heart itself. Cases of this kind are indeed of rare occurrence; those of an opposite kind, in which the state of the body affects the mind, are of daily notoriety. There are diseases which are well known to produce a gloomy and distressing temperament, that lead men to view every thing through an alarming and dismaying medium, and to draw towards themselves all that is awful and distressing. Every object presented to the mind then assumes the deep tinge of its own gloom, and an unhappy facility is acquired in perverting every topic of consolation and encouragement. The prevalence of this morbid affection produces in some fixed melancholy; but even the slighter diffusion of it may be attended with the most trying irritation and depression. Even in prosperity,

when external circumstances are generally agreeable, it sometimes turns the fair face of nature into an universal blank, and embitters every enjoyment; but in adversity and affliction, its operation is still more distressing; every object becomes distorted; the rod is magnified into an instrument of death and terror; the most gloomy apprehensions are indulged; nothing is seen but what produces perplexity and disquietude. Is the sufferer an unconverted sinner? he regards his state as hopeless; "I have sinned," he says, "beyond the reach of mercy. These visitations are the presages of eternal ruin; God has forsaken me; my harvest is past, my summer is ended, and I am not saved." We have known similar views entertained by many excellent persons, of whose piety we could entertain no doubt. Whilst hungering and thirsting after righteousness,—evinced an abhorrence of sin, and a fear of offending God,—they have gloomily concluded, that there remained no hope for them, and that their hearts were not right in the sight of God. It is difficult to reason with persons in this frame, or under this tendency of mind. But wherefore do they write those bitter things against themselves? There is no reason why they should. But the cause why they do so is to be sought in their physical economy; and till there be an alteration there, all the succours of religion will be urged in vain.

Depression of mind is often the result of *severe temptation*. Satanic influence involves much mystery, but the word of God renders it undoubted. This apostate spirit—this enemy of all righteousness, is deeply concerned in opposing the designs of God for the salvation of the souls of men. With this view he exerts all his policy from day to day, continually lying in wait to deceive, and, "like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour."

"He now is plotting how he may seduce
Us all from obedience; that with him,

Depriv'd of happiness, we may partake
His punishment—eternal misery,
Which would be all his solace and revenge,
As a despite done against the Most High."

Now Satan usually finds a season of affliction favourable to his work of temptation, and he never fails to avail himself of it. Although much that is ascribed to the agency of Satan ought rather to be viewed as resulting from the evil of our own hearts, yet that agency is often exerted to the detriment of the souls of men, and in no case oftener than in affliction. When Pharaoh was informed that the children of Israel were entangled in the wilderness, he resolved to pursue them, and mustered his forces for that purpose, in the anticipation of an easy and decisive victory. Thus, when Satan sees us entangled with perplexity and distress, he frequently comes in upon us as a flood, that if possible he may utterly overwhelm us. In this manner he assailed our Lord: it was when approaching the awful consummation of his woes, and when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, that Satan exerted his utmost malice against him, and turned the hour of his deepest anguish into the hour and power of darkness. Thus it was with Job: it was when he was suffering from the irritating influence of his strange and complicated woes, that he tempted him to curse God to his face: and Satan is never wanting to exert his power upon those who are exercised by the hand of God. Some of his temptations are of a nature not to be misunderstood;—their design is self evident; to excite a murmuring and rebellious disposition, by representing God as a hard task master,—as severe and vindictive in his dispositions,—unjust and unreasonable in his requirements; thus he seeks to inflame the passions; to pervert the judgment; to excite bitterness, opposition, and presumption. Or he approaches in a more covert and subtle manner, and by reasoning, not against God, but for him, although in a manner

equally false and deceptive, he endeavours to cast the soul into despondency, and to prevent it from obtaining help or comfort. Great is the distress which in consequence is sometimes experienced.

The want of a sure trust and confidence in God as our God, is another cause of depression. Without the clear assurance of God's favour there can neither be stability nor comfort in affliction. This is the anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast. Nothing else will hold in the time of its tribulation. The storm increasing will drive it from its fastenings, and toss it to and fro, like a vessel which, having lost its helm, floats at the mercy of the winds and the waves. That which alone can prepare us for trouble, and support us in it, is a scriptural confidence in God. The deeper our conviction of his pardoning love, the stronger will be our trust in his interposition. The greater our assurance of present forgiveness, the fuller will be our reliance upon future deliverance. How was it that the saints of old time were so joyful and triumphant in their afflictions? was it not because they were strong in faith, giving glory to God? The 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews presents a striking display of this truth. It exhibits an host of worthies, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and put to flight the armies of the aliens." A lively faith enables us to rejoice in God's paternal care and love. This is enough of itself, without any addition, to warrant every expectation. It contains within itself a ready answer to every want, and will expand into length and breadth enough to cover every sorrow. It not only sheds the soothing light of peace on every thing that is gone by, but the sparkling ray of hope on all things yet to come. May I trust in his pardoning compassion? may I flee to him as my father? may I believe that,

sinner as I am, he has redeemed me by his Son, and that he owns me as his child? then as a child may I depend upon him, and expect his support and deliverance. So far then as the mind is under the influence of this principle, it is kept in perfect peace. But if faith be weak, every grace will be weak also; our submission will be partial; our hope will be faint; our peace will be disturbed; dispirited, weak, and cowardly, our souls will sink under small difficulties. All the disquietude and depression which a christian feels, spring from the weakness or the want of faith in God. It is not from outward things. These are often blamed, and these may be very trying; but it is not the water without the vessel that sinks it, but the water that gets within. The primitive christians could say, "we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing:" and we have seen afflicted men, with every aggravation that desertion and poverty could cause, still happy and contented, because they could rely on God as their God. This is the universal remedy, the charm for every grief:

"Give what he can, without him we are poor;
With him rich, take what he will away."

The true reason, therefore, why christians are so accessible to fear, so preyed upon by anxiety, so depressed by affliction, is, because they do not sufficiently rely upon God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

O for a strong and lasting faith!
To credit what the Almighty saith;
To embrace the message of his Son,
And call the joys of heaven my own.*

These are the principal causes of depression: others more

particular might be mentioned, but it is probable they might all be reduced to one or other of those specified. This state of mind is productive of serious evils. It indisposes for the performance of duty. Hope is the great stimulus to exertion, but despondency paralyzes our energies, like the pinching blast that checks the progress of vegetation; it prevents the due exercise of reason and of grace, and cuts the sinews of obedience. He who despairs either of deriving advantage from his troubles, or of obtaining deliverance from them, will neither repent, nor pray, nor reform. Dejection causes him to indulge in all the bitterness of unavailing grief, and to turn away from the refuge which divine mercy has provided, and where he might find security and peace. It takes away the relish for present mercies, and disqualifies us for receiving those comforts which are proper for an afflicted state;—it fills the spirit with impatience and discontent;—it disposes us to fretfulness and resentment;—it dishonours God by misrepresenting his character and designs, by indulging hard thoughts of him, and by falsifying his word;—it doubles the real affliction without giving any relief;—it urges onward to desperation, and often drives men to intoxication, to infidelity, to suicide. To persons who are suffering from depression, the following suggestions may be useful :—

Examine carefully the cause of your depression.—Such an examination will always be found highly necessary and extensively important. Thus David, in a season of deep affliction, when his soul was cast down within him, remonstrated with himself, and seriously investigated the cause of his dejection; “why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?” He seems to have entered upon a course of reasoning something like this, “this discomposure of mind may arise after all from mistaken views of my own state, or misconceptions of the ways of God’s dealing with his people. Let me not rest, therefore, in hasty or

superficial views. Let me explore what it is that rankles in my breast. Is it a real, or only an imaginary evil? if real, is there no remedy, no consolation?" Such we may suppose to have been the import of the Psalmist's expostulation with himself; and such investigation, when properly conducted, will always be found productive of the most beneficial results; it enables us to detect what is amiss; to mark this passion as too violent, and that affection as wrong directed; it detects the errors of judgment into which we have fallen, and the reasons of encouragement which we have overlooked; it discovers to us the evils which may have rendered our afflictions necessary, or the blessings which they are intended to produce; and, above all, it directs us to the grand antidote of all distress,—hope in God. Would you then, afflicted mourner, obtain relief in your distress, examine the matter coolly, and see what is the cause. If it is for offences against God, then weep and mourn on account of your offences. The more you are humbled, the more your disposition agrees with your character as a guilty creature: but despond not. Christ is equally able and willing to relieve you. He is the enemy of sin, but he is the friend of sinners. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and say, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." He will not—he cannot refuse thy application; for he has said,—he is now saying, "come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But, if it is wholly on another account, consider how inadequate is the cause to so violent an effect. What though you are afflicted, though your family is severely exercised, though the objects of your tenderest affections are snatched away in a moment, though losses and disappointments attend you in your worldly circumstances; are these sufficient reasons for being thus cast down? They would be, if God had not provided superior enjoyments and consolations; if they were not intended for ultimate advantage. Whatever may fail, or change, or die,

the Lord still liveth, and "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Reflect seriously on the sin of refusing to be comforted, and on the important duty of seeking relief immediately from God. To want comfort is an affliction; but to refuse it, when offered, is a sin. A time may come, wherein you may as vehemently desire it, as you now obstinately refuse it. The anguish of spirit may be indeed too great to admit of comfort immediately and at once. David was so troubled that he could not speak; and the Israelites in the wilderness were in such anguish that they could not, for a time, listen to the overtures of Moses; "he spake unto the children of Israel, but they hearkened not unto him, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." But to refuse comfort on purpose that grief may swell the higher, to feed your passions with fresh fuel, and to stir it up with aggravating thoughts; this is the way to increase your sorrows, and to render them the occasion of fresh sin. Whatever be the cause of your depression, whether it originates in contemplating God as an offended judge and lawgiver, or as a father whose paternal character has been trampled on, remember that there is but one effectual path out of trouble, and that is the path that leads to God. This is effectual to deliver us from every sorrow, the deepest and the worst. If we catch at worldly things for help, we shall find them but as straws that mock our grasp. If we cling to men around us, they can hold us but for a moment, nay, perhaps may drag us down into deeper sorrow. If we depend upon ourselves, our strength is every day diminishing. But if we turn to God, in penitence, in faith, with all the earnestness of drowning agony, "Lord, save, or I perish,"—he can, he will deliver from the lowest deep. No one ever cried unto God in vain. "The Lord is a refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble." It always has been so, and so it always will be to those who turn to him. Thus David found it

When he said, "the sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid: in my distress, I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God; he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. He sent from above; he took me; he drew me out of many waters." So the Psalmist found it when he cried, "deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me: yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me." Isaiah knew it when he said in the name of God, "when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee." But, do you say, "I would return to God, but I cannot. I have neglected him too long to think of turning to him now. My heart is broken, my spirit is gone, my punishment is greater than I can bear; I have fallen too low to rise again!" O recollect the Psalmist's state, and his escape from it. The sorrows of death compassed him about, the pains of hell gat hold of him; he found trouble and sorrow; but yet he called upon the name of the Lord; "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." There is no condition, however wretched, that can hinder our return to God; there is no place of exile, however distant, which is beyond the notice and the help of God. Go to Him then for help. Do not be utterly cast down; throw not away you hope; let your sorrow issue in fervent supplication to Him who can and will deliver you. Your first cry to God will give birth to another, and every successive thought and word of devotion will take you farther from your griefs, and bring you nearer to God;—will raise you something out of the horrible pit, and lift you nearer to him. Only begin. Only cry, however feebly and imperfectly, for help. "Before I begin to pray," said a poor, but earnest christian woman, "I seem frequently as if I could not say a word of prayer; but when I have begun, I seem as

if I could not leave off saying words of prayer." And what is open to one is open to all. O, if you were but to pour out your complaint to God as you do to men,—did you but ask from God as you ask from men, then would you soon be able to declare with David, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." O the blessedness of casting all our burden on the Lord! of mingling the most earnest supplication with the most quiet resignation; of catching something of the spirit of our divine master, when he exclaimed almost in the same breath, "father, let this cup pass from me; yet not my will, but thine be done." Here is the true secret of contentment, patience, and fortitude; here is the remedy against all melancholy thoughts; the only support in adversity.

Exercise yourself in meditating on the mercies which call for thankfulness, as you have done in dwelling on the afflictions which have occasioned your despondency. The apostle seems to enjoin too much when he says, "in every thing give thanks, but it is not without reason. There is no one, however afflicted, but, if not blinded by passion and unbelief, may find much more cause for thankfulness than for despondency. But in affliction, we are generally disposed to look on the dark side of providence, and on that only. We are like froward children, who, if you take away one of their play things, in resentment throw away all the rest. Desponding christian, take your condition, however trying, has it no alleviations? Let candour,—let gratitude, let truth examine the circumstances of your case: is there nothing in the time, nothing in the manner, nothing in the subject of affliction, that serves to soften its pressure? Do you believe that it might not have been worse? O recollect how many mercies you enjoy at this moment. What would your sufferings have been, had God proportioned them to your sins: though heavy, yet is it not from the disposition you are indulging that

they derive their principal weight and aggravation? Besides, they are not immutable dispensations. What changes often take place to the surprise, as well as to the joy of the desponding sufferer.

“ The Lord can change the darkest skies,
Can give us day for night;
Make drops of sacred pleasure rise
To rivers of delight.”

And who can tell what advantages you may reap from your present trials. When a field is newly ploughed up, and its smooth and verdant surface is transformed into rough unsightly furrows, and its plants and flowers are buried under deformed clods, the eye looks round with regret at the apparent destruction of its beauty, but afterwards when harvest arrives, when the furrows stand thick with corn, and look like a boundless sea of plenty, then the scene yields inexpressible delight to the beholder, and welcome sheaves to the reaper. Thus when God visits us with chastisements, and makes long furrows in the field of our prosperity, we mourn and repine that he should deface the beauty of our condition, but afterwards, when the seed he casts into these furrows springs up and overspreads the soul with all the beauties of holiness and peace, then the wisdom and the goodness of God are alike apparent.

Meditate much upon the amazing love of God in the gift, and sufferings, and death of his Son. It is but reasonable that you should meditate as much upon Christ and grace, as you do upon sin and misery. God requireth you to see and feel your sin and misery, but then it is in order that you may magnify the remedy, and cordially embrace it. Never think of sin and hell alone, but in order to induce you to think of Christ and grace. This is the duty even of the worst. Are your sins ever before you? why is not pardoning grace in

Christ before you? Is hell open before you? why is not the Redeemer also before you? Do you reply, because sin and hell are mine, but Christ, and holiness, and heaven, are not mine? Then it is because you choose to have it so. It is true God hath placed death before you, but he hath placed life the first, and he commands you to choose life that you may live. Nothing can be more certain than that God hath so far made over the blessings of salvation to all that hear the gospel, that nothing but their final obstinate refusal of these blessings can cause their condemnation. O! beware, lest you reject that mercy which God never denied to any one, and which, so far from refusing, he is now offering to you.

THE DUTIES OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DELIVERED FROM AFFLICTION.

My soul, through my Redeemer's care,
Sav'd from the second death I feel,
My eyes from tears of dark despair,
My feet from falling into hell.

Wherefore to him my feet shall run,
My eyes on his perfections gaze,
My soul shall live for God alone,
And all within me shout his praise.

"WHAT SHALL I RENDER UNTO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS
BENEFITS TOWARDS ME?"

"I WILL OFFER TO THEE THE SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING,
AND WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD."

PSALM CXVI., XL., XVII.

IN a former chapter directions were given for a proper behaviour in affliction, that the end may be secured for which it is appointed by our heavenly father; the following counsels are intended to illustrate the temper and conduct which we ought to cherish and maintain after we have experienced a deliverance from affliction.

Let your deliverance be acknowledged by fervent gratitude and thanksgiving to God. It is the direction of the Apostle, that "in every thing" we should "give thanks;"

—that we should endeavour to maintain in our hearts a constant feeling of religious gratitude,—and be ready to express our gratitude with our lips. There are, perhaps, few occasions which call more loudly upon us for such feeling, and for such expression of thankfulness, as when we are delivered from some great and piercing calamity ; therefore, says David, “ offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.” That your mind may be suitably impressed with a sense of God’s goodness in your deliverance, call to mind the circumstances of your affliction ;—think of the pains you endured in sickness, the bitter apprehensions you had of death ;—think how great was your distress,—how pressing your difficulties,—how gloomy your apprehensions,—how great and merciful your deliverance. In the removal of your affliction be careful to acknowledge the hand of God. Stop not at the instrumentality of second causes. Whosoever is the instrument of any good, yet, salvation is of the Lord. Whoever brings it, it is he who sends it. Though he is pleased to use the intervention of means, yet he administers those means, and renders them effectual, otherwise they would be wholly unavailing. As God sends affliction to evidence his power, wisdom, and sovereignty ; so he sends deliverance to manifest his goodness and bounty, and the return which he expects is most equitable and reasonable. “ Call upon me in the day of trouble : I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” Seek to have a proper view of your own unworthiness, and of the favours you have received. Think not that it is the result of your own merit, or that you are delivered because the sufferings you have endured have expiated your guilt. The greatest affliction under heaven cannot possibly atone for one transgression. Nothing but the blood of the Son of God can countervail the weight of the least sin against the Most High. “ I am not worthy,” said Jacob, “ of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto

thy servant." Here is not a word or thought of merit, as though by his faith, or obedience, or affliction, he could prefer a claim to the mercies he had received. No, the mind of the real saint revolts at the thought. The conviction of his sinfulness and utter demerit is too deeply riveted in his heart. He feels himself, from first to last, the absolute debtor of divine grace; less than the least of all the mercy and truth he has experienced; unworthy of the very crumbs falling from that table at which he has been so plentifully supplied, inasmuch as he has forfeited every blessing by his transgressions. Observe every thing that has been special in your deliverance. The suitableness of your gratitude will depend upon the estimate you form of the mercy you have received. A truly thankful mind will not content itself with a general view of the Lord's goodness, but will search out its most remarkable expression, and all the circumstances by which it has been rendered illustrious. As an artist, when contemplating some rare and beautiful painting, marks with delighted feeling the correctness of its proportions, the richness of its colouring, the delicacy of its tints, the accuracy of its delineations, and the sublimity of its design; so ought you to review the circumstances of your deliverance from affliction. Reflect, how evidently the Lord's hand was in your deliverance, so that you were constrained to say "this is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes;"—how deliverance came to you in answer to prayer;—how it came when there was but little ground for hope;—how the extremity of your distress was God's opportunity of sending relief. By reflections of this nature you are to endeavor to awaken in your heart gratitude and praise.

Be careful to remember and fulfil the engagements and vows into which you have entered in time of affliction. There are many things that concur in the time of trouble to excite within us desires and purposes of amendment. At such a time we are frequently inclined to make vows to God,

and to bind our souls with resolutions to mortify sin, to be more diligent in duty, and to follow Christ with greater steadfastness and zeal. When this is done with sincerity, with dependance upon divine aid, and under the influence of correct views, not as an equivalent for the favour of God, or as the condition of our deliverance, but only as a preparation for receiving the tokens of his favour; it will be found a useful mean of promoting the great end which affliction is intended to accomplish. Thus David did: "I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble." Thus Hannah did: "and she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a male child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." The motives to seriousness, however, which are induced by affliction, are usually soon erased by the return of prosperity, and are succeeded by temptations to lukewarmness and forgetfulness. Delay not, therefore, to pay the vows you have made in the time of trouble. Seize the first opportunity for the purpose. Delays in this case are sure to be dangerous. Solomon was aware of this, and therefore he directs, "when thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it."

Have you then been the subject of affliction, and have you experienced delivering mercy? recollect what were your views and purposes in your trouble, and endeavour to have those views and resolutions perpetuated and confirmed. Were you convinced of the evil nature and fatal consequences of sin? Call to mind your feelings in those interesting and affecting moments. Did not anguish and horror take hold upon you? Did you not see sin to be the "abominable thing" which God hateth, and the wages of it to be death? Did you not exclaim against the folly, the infatuation

by which you had been led to commit it? Reflecting upon your transgressions, aggravated by knowledge, and by obligations the most tender and awful, were you not ready to conclude that your case was hopeless? And when at length you were encouraged to approach and to address a God you had provoked, was not this your language, "cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." Cry to God then, for strength to fulfil your engagements. The Psalmist took this course, and found it successful. "In the day when I cried unto thee thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." Put away all iniquity. When assailed by the persuasions of the wicked, or by the solicitations of the tempter, turn from them with the pious abhorrence of Joseph, "how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

What were your views of the world? How vain and comfortless did it then appear? how unworthy and unsuitable to be the portion of the soul? how unable to contribute to your most urgent wants, or to promote your most important interests. Thus the favour of God was more in your estimation than life itself; and you promised that thence forward you would renounce the world, and live to God alone. Then keep alive in your heart the same apprehension of things after trouble that you had in it. Guard against relapsing, in the smallest degree, into your former worldliness. Remember that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You "cannot serve God and mammon."

What were your views of death? Did it appear a trifle—a thing to be sported with? Oh, no! its approach filled you

with fear and trembling. To think of dying was awful and affecting. To take a final leave of earth ;—to bid farewell to friends ;—to feel pain of body, and remorse of conscience ;—to contemplate an opening eternity ;—and to find the judge standing before the door, all made you exclaim, “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.” You assumed the appearance of penitence ;—you promised, if spared, to devote yourself to the service of God. Your prayer has been heard. God has brought you back from the gates of the grave. But have you fulfilled your vows ? Consider how sad will be your condition if sickness find you again in the very same state. What will you say to conscience when it shall confront you ? How will you meet the king of terrors, if, in spite of your purposes of amendment and devotedness to God, you are surprised at the last in the indulgence of the very sins you formerly mourned over, and bound yourself to renounce ?

Recall your views of time. How important and valuable it appeared, as it was viewed by you in connection with an awful and never-ending eternity. Then you exclaimed, “a world for another hour ! (when you could scarcely hope for another in which to prepare for a future state.) Oh, for another sabbath in which to worship God in his sanctuary, and to listen to the glad tidings of salvation. Oh, for time to make my peace with heaven !” And what a trouble was it to you, to look and see how much you had spent in sin and folly. Then so fully was your mind impressed with the value of time, that you were ready to think, though you had Methuselah’s years to live it would be unreasonable to mispend one hour of them all. . And now, that health is restored, can you be so foolish as to trifle away time as before ? Can you squander your precious hours in folly and negligence ; and, in forgetfulness of your vows and protestations, relapse into your former habits ? Take heed that it be not the case. In every

instance endeavour to shew your thankfulness to God for all the benefits he hath conferred upon you, by constantly remembering, and striving to act up to the resolution you formed in the time of your distress; so shall you have abundant reason to say, "it was good for me to be afflicted;" and so shall your chastening, however grievous it might seem at the time, be made instrumental in working in you the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Beware of forgetting the deliverance you have experienced. The influence of impressive scenes soon wears away. We are prone to lose the sense of our mercies, and all the fine religious feelings they once produced. Gratitude is, without question, a most lovely virtue, but it seldom lives in the extremes either of adversity or success; it is like those fine colours which storms and sunshine equally deface. How strongly were the Israelites impressed for a time, by the interpositions of God in their behalf. They sang his praises; they resolved to distrust him no more; they said, "all that the Lord hath spoken will we do." But they soon forgot his works, and the wonders which he had shewed them; murmured again; rebelled again. Their mercies were written on the sand, and the first wave of trouble that arose washed them away. Hence David lays an embargo on his thoughts, "bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Hence it was usual for saints, under the old testament dispensation, to set up some visible monument to commemorate the mercies they had received. They erected stones, or built altars, that they might serve as remembrancers of the deliverances they had experienced. Thus "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shem; and called the name of it Ebenezer; saying, 'hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'" And thus Joseph, by the very names which he gave his children, would recall the wonders which the Lord had shewn him. "Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh,

for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim, for God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." And hence the command given to Ephraim, "set thee up waymarks; make thee high heaps; set thine heart towards the high way, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin daughter of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." A faithful recollection is of great importance to the christian. Nothing can impress or influence our minds when it is forgotten. We should, therefore, keep our afflictions and our deliverances fresh in our recollection, that we may know whether we have rendered according to the benefits conferred. How much of our insensibility and ingratitude springs from forgetfulness and inattention; and how well may it be said of thousands, as it was of Israel, "of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee." As it is so necessary to keep things in mind, it would be well for you, in every possible way, to aid recollection, and to endeavour to perpetuate those good feelings which your mercies produce when you receive them. With this view mention them often; call them to mind; strive frequently to stir up your mind by way of remembrance. What can be more displeasing to God, than forgetfulness of the deliverances he hath shewn you? Even an heathen could say, "he is ungrateful who falsely denies a benefit, and he who refuses to requite it; but most ungrateful of all is he who forgets it."

Study to improve the deliverance you have experienced, by securing the end for which you have been afflicted. We can conceive of very different ends which are required by the different circumstances of the afflicted. Is the afflicted one who has neglected God and his service? the end of his affliction is, doubtless, to bring him to repentance; to humble him under a sense of his sin; and to reclaim him from it. Is he a professor of religion, who has not felt its power, but has been

dead while he lived? the end of his affliction is to bring him to feel the necessity of decision, and how unavailing is the form of godliness when not accompanied by the power thereof. Is he a wayward child of God, whose conduct requires correction? or is he one whose sincerity must be tried, and whose faith and patience must be put to the test? or is he one whose easy circumstances have attached him too much to the world, and rendered it necessary that his repose should be disturbed, and that his attention should be recalled to heavenly joys, by embittering his earthly comforts? all these cases include the end of affliction. This end, therefore, directly or indirectly, has been the design of your's. Whatever has been your distress, behold the object which he proposed who brought the trouble upon you. Whatever may have been the immediate object, this was his ultimate aim; and, O, how important in itself! how worthy of God! how desirable to yourself! all your happiness is involved in it. Now it is the duty of every one who has been delivered from affliction, to enquire how far he has been benefitted by it, and by what means the design of it may be fully accomplished. It is too true that in some cases the operation of affliction is just the reverse of that which is intended. The mind is brought by its suffering into a worse state than before. The heart is hardened, and obedience to God is rendered more improbable from the hard thoughts entertained of him, and the rebellious spirit indulged: like iron, which acquires increasing hardness from being often heated, and quenched in water. In these cases we see at once the crime and the calamity of sinners. They abuse to the most awful purposes what was capable of yielding the richest advantages. They rebel against the government of God; they add insult to provocation; they increase their sufferings in the most fearful manner by adding eternal misery to mortal pains. How far has this been the case with you? do you dread this conduct? but how far have you

shewn the sincerity of your fears by avoiding every approach to it, and by endeavouring to secure the end of your affliction? In what respects are you the better for what you have endured? have you been led to look back upon your former life, and to search out the occasion there might be for such a visitation? Be assured, when God afflicts, it is not without a cause. Oh, then, try to find out the cause, and pray that the design of your heavenly father may be fully accomplished. Then only do afflictions benefit us, when they check our pride and vanity; when they strengthen our faith; when they enliven our zeal; when they revive our hope and joy; when they diminish the influence of present things; when they quicken the wheels of christian obedience; and prompt us to a more uninterrupted communion with our God. Have you reflected upon the goodness of God in sending the trial, and thus turning your thoughts to your spiritual state? Have you considered what your condition might have been, if, instead of deliverance, God had called you suddenly away by death, when you were slumbering at your ease, instead of being in a state of readiness for the Bridegroom's approach. God has been administering affliction in the form of a remedy, and now that it is over, he is waiting to see what good effects it has produced; what changes it has wrought in the thoughts, affections, and purposes of your heart; how far it has detached you from the world, and promoted your spirituality, and your earnestness in the pursuit of heavenly things; how much more circumspect, and watchful of your ways you will be for the time to come; and how heartily you will apply yourself, on the one hand to root out the evils of your nature, and on the other, to attain the christian graces and virtues in which you are deficient. In short, God has in mercy given you a new life, and he is now waiting to see whether you will become a new man.

Endeavour to glorify God, by rendering the deliverance

you have experienced promotive of the spiritual good of others. In the anticipation of his full recovery from the effects of his sin, our Lord said to Peter, "when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." The direction is no less appropriate to those who have been recovered from affliction. Various are the ways in which the disciple, who has been favoured in his distresses with special mercies, may strengthen his brethren. He may do it by communicating his experience of the divine aid and kindness. How animating will it be to them to be told of the effectual support you received in your distresses; of the gracious visitations of the divine presence by which you were comforted and strengthened; of the consolations you have received in the house of mourning; and of the many rich and important benefits you have derived from some of your greatest trials. It may be mortifying to you, but still it may be useful to them, to state, where prudence sanctions it, what mischiefs have arisen from confidence in yourselves, from remissness in secret devotion; and from the influence of the world in engrossing your cares, in chilling your affections, in impairing your relish for spiritual enjoyments, and in calling forth the chastenings of the divine hand. You may strengthen your brethren too, by narrating the manner in which your afflictions have operated for your good; how they induced reflection and prayer, humiliation and penitence; how faith was acknowledged, and prayer answered; how by your affliction you have been led to a closer union with Christ, and a more intimate acquaintance with his love, and faithfulness, and truth. Now you are bound to act thus by the command of God. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a feeble heart, be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." This is a fit expression of gratitude to him who hath restored your soul, and it is an expression which he

values. A truly thankful mind will not content itself with mere verbal praises and acknowledgments, but will study and endeavour to find out and do all that may be well pleasing to his great benefactor. When will a generous man feel the most pleasure in the bounty by which he hath relieved a fellow creature from poverty, and placed him in ease and comfort? It is not only when he witnesses the happiness which has succeeded to anxiety and despair, but also when the benefitted individual shews himself anxious to do good to the afflicted beside him. Thus God rejoices in the influences of his grace. This, too, is one of the most useful forms of christian charity; —it is charity to the soul; charity to the afflicted, the tried, the mourning, the discouraged. Think how assiduously the wicked labour to seduce others to sin; with what art, and subtlety, and perseverance, they try to overcome their scruples, to corrupt their principles, to repress their fears, and to awaken their prejudices. And shall they be more active to pervert, than we are to establish? to corrupt, than we are to sanctify? to ruin, than we are to save? Besides, the discharge of this duty is the best way to your own establishment in every good word and work. Every warning you give will operate on your own fears, and every encouragement on your hopes. It is the promise of God, “he that watereth others shall be watered also himself. This duty is recommended to you by many examples. To Job this honourable testimony was borne by his friends: “behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands; thy words have upheld him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees.” We read of Apollos helping “them much who had believed through grace.” This was the character of the Redeemer, that “the bruised reed he would not break, and that the smoking flax he would not quench.” And of the Lord Jehovah it is said, that “he giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength.”

In this way your afflictions will be productive of a two-fold advantage, and not only will you reap from them the peaceable fruits of righteousness, in the increase of your own personal piety, but they will promote your usefulness to others, and thus "the blessing of him that was ready to perish" shall come upon you.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST IN AFFLICTION.

Yes, thou art precious to my soul,
My transport and my trust ;
Jewels, to thee, are gandy toys,
And gold is sordid dust.

All my capacious powers can boast,
In thee most richly meet ;
Nor to my eyes is light so dear,
Or friendship half so sweet.

" HOW GREAT IS HIS GOODNESS, AND HOW GREAT IS HIS
BEAUTY."

SECHARIAH IX., XIX.

CONTEMPLATION of the Saviour's excellencies is a principal mean of invigorating the life of faith, and hope, and love, as well as of supporting the mind under the pressure of affliction. "Looking unto Jesus" is a direction of incalculable importance. On this subject an able writer remarks: "in this present 'beholding of the glory of Christ,' the life and power of faith are most eminently acted. And from the exercise of faith, love to Christ principally, if not solely, arises and springs. If, therefore, we desire to have faith in its vigour, or love in its power, giving rest, complacency, and satisfaction to our souls, we are to seek for them in the diligent discharge of

this duty ; elsewhere they will not be found. Herein would I live ; herein would I die ; herein would I dwell in all my thoughts and affections ; to the withering and consuming of all the painted beauties of this world, to the crucifying all things here below, until they become to me a dead and deformed thing, no way suitable for affectionate embraces." Next to prayer, nothing, perhaps, is so much adapted to promote the exercise of faith, and to kindle the affections into holy fervour, as frequent meditation on the person and offices, the love and sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Meditation is to all these truths what the opened eye is to the light ; it admits them into the understanding as objects of knowledge, and it applies them to the soul for the promotion of its hope and joy. Where communion with Christ is not sought by frequent and devout meditation, faith will decline in its exercise, love will languish in the heart, joy in him will be almost a stranger to the soul, and if we are in circumstances of affliction, our strength will be small, and we shall faint in the day of adversity. Meditation gives life and vigour to faith, and it is faith which makes the Saviour precious, and inspires the soul with holy joy. "To them that believe," says an apostle, "he is precious." It is by faith we realise our interest in him as a Saviour, and when an assurance is possessed that we have a part in all the blessings of his love, and all the riches of his grace, this leads the believer to prize him, to rejoice in him. Is he my Saviour, my refuge, my guide, my protector ; then all I have beside is mean compared with him. "None but Christ," said the martyr ; "none but Christ," responds the christian.

"Jesus, my all in all thou art ;
 My rest in toil ; my ease in pain ;
 The medicine of my broken heart ;
 In war my peace ; in loss my gain ;
 In grief my joy unspeakable ;
 My life in death ; my heaven in hell."

Christian sufferer, that feelings like these may inspire your heart, let your mind dwell with steadfast meditation on the excellencies of Jesus. Avail yourself of every appointed mean to aid you in holding communion with him. Implore the Spirit's help, that you may behold your Lord in all his glory, as it is displayed in his own word. Let the exercise of faith accompany all your efforts; then will its enlivening elevating power be felt; then will you rise above the depressing influence of your sorrows; your affections will be kindled into holy fervour, your heart will overflow with consolation, and you will learn to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord." With the view of aiding your meditations, I would place before you some of the particulars which render him precious in christian estimation, and especially in time of affliction.

Contemplate *the dignity of his person* The proper divinity of the Saviour is a subject most luminously revealed in the word of God. It is written as with a sunbeam. Upon this doctrine the whole system of christianity is built. It is intimately connected with all that is cheering in the gospel. It constitutes the very foundation of the sinner's hope and joy. If the divinity of Christ be denied, no place remains for the doctrine of the atonement; and take away the doctrine of the atonement, and there remains no solid ground of encouragement for a guilty world; and the awakened sinner is left to encounter all the fearful consequences of his guilt, without one single ray of hope to beam on his benighted soul. How dangerous must every error be which is in the least connected with the person of the self-existent and eternal Word, seeing that there is none other name given among men whereby they can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ? The doctrine of the divinity of the Lord Jesus rests not merely on a single statement, or topic of argument; it is interwoven with the whole tissue of sacred truth. The properly and rightfully

divine is attributed to him in the most unqualified manner, and in the most substantial degree; and meets us in such a variety of forms, that if it be denied, we can no longer place dependence on the language of scripture, we must abandon all the ordinary and legitimate rules of criticism and of judgment, and despair of ascertaining its real meaning. Nothing can exceed its unequivocal averments. There is "line upon line." "He was God." He is "the great God." He is "the true God." He is "God, blessed for ever." He is "the only wise God." He is "the Lord (Jehovah) our righteousness." He is "the mighty God." It is difficult to conceive how words can be more potential and descriptive. If, as the Unitarians assert, Christ is no more than man, then must we regard the scriptures as so written, that the natural interpretation of them is a source of total and dreadful error, and, instead of being a sure guide, none would be more uncertain;—then the sacred writers have deceived millions who wished to know the divine will, and have led them to pay divine honours to a man, or an angel, and thus drawn them into the erroneous crime of idolatry. Can a system be true which evidently leads to this conclusion? Conformable to these declarations of the Saviour's divinity, the scriptures ascribe to Christ all the peculiar attributes of Deity. Is God omnipotent? "I am Alpha and Omega,—the Almighty." Is God omniscient? "all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the heart and the reins." Is God omnipresent? "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Is God self-existent? "his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Is God immutable? "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever." All the peculiar claims of God are represented as belonging unto Christ. Is God to be loved? "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maranatha." Is God to be obeyed? "ye serve the Lord

Christ." Is God to be trusted? "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Is God to be adored? "let all the angels of God worship him." "All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." No discrimination is applied, no reserve is admitted. All the peculiar acts of God are attributed to Christ. Is creation a divine work? "all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that is made." Is sustenance a divine act? "by him all things consist." "He upholdeth all things by the word of his power." Is universal possession a divine prerogative? "he is Lord of all." Does supreme dominion belong to God? "thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Are the scriptures divinely inspired? "the prophets searched what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow." Is it God alone who can pardon sin? "the Son of man hath power to forgive sins." Is the gift of eternal life a divine bestowment? "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Does universal judgment belong to God? "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." All these are confessedly the acts of the infinite God alone, and involve the absolute possession of power and perfections without limits. To create, preserve, and govern the universe,—to give and restore life,—to forgive sins,—to bestow eternal life,—to judge the world of angels and of men,—and to determine the destinies of all intelligent beings, are, if any thing can be, evidences of true and proper divinity. The conclusion is of the most consolatory character; one with which our peace and safety are inseparably connected. It is a conviction of the true and proper divinity of the Son of God

which can alone soothe the mind, when suffering from the pressure of guilt, and the apprehension of punishment. It is not the mere feeling of tenderness and compassion that can meet the case of fallen and sinful man ; there must be power and authority also. When conscience strikes its scorpion sting into the breast, when the "heart meditates terror," when judgment threatens vengeance, and hell discloses its scenes of woe, the sinner eagerly looks round, and wistfully seeks pity and deliverance. Whither can he flee? to whom can he go for help and deliverance? shall he seek them from mortal hand? Bitter would be the disappointment; it would be but a mockery of his woe. Can man redeem his brother? can human power extract the barbed arrow from the guilty conscience? Shall he then implore some super-angelic being to undertake his cause? Let that being be ever so exalted, still he is but a creature; his power is limited; and, therefore, he is unfit to be the saviour of guilty man. Which of all the angelic throng could have borne away the ponderous load of human guilt? or to which could we implicitly confide our immortal interests? Lamb of God! thou alone art able to keep that which is committed unto thee against the great day. As a compassionate and almighty Saviour, Christ merits the highest confidence of the lost and the dying. On him, as possessing infinite perfections, the guilty and distressed sinner may repose his interests with unlimited confidence. O, how precious is the thought of a divine Saviour! how great the consolation arising from the consideration of his greatness, his dignity, his glory! In his divine nature he is the author of being, and the fountain and preserver of life. The immense creation, incomparably beyond the grasp of our finite intellect, originated in his unsearchable understanding. By his word he formed the earth, and stretched out the heavens. The former he peopled with "living things innumerable;" and the latter he clothed with a splendour and beauty which un-

ceasingly speak his praise. "By him all things consist." He is their constant prop and stay. His presence pervades the whole universe. He is not only in heaven, but on earth; yea, "he fills all things." To a mind divinely illuminated,

" His glories blaze all nature round,
And strike the wondering sight."

"The heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool." All the angelic throng bow to his sovereign sway. The burning seraph and the smallest atom are equally under his control, and exist for his glory. In the dignity and glory of the Redeemer let every subject of divine grace rejoice. Let them remember that the Saviour on whom their hopes repose is the mighty God. Can they then hesitate to confide in him, or question their safety whilst protected by him who is infinite in power?

He is precious *in the efficacy of his atonement*. That Christ died to make atonement for human guilt is a truth every where asserted in the sacred volume. From that book we not only learn the awful fact of man's apostacy, and consequent guilt and danger; his subjection to sin, and condemnation, and wrath; but also, the blessed means of his restoration. Christ is frequently represented as suffering for us, and as tasting death for us. This was obscurely intimated in the first promise made to man, "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." It was shadowed forth in all the sacrifices which were offered by divine appointment, from the first transgression to the time when Christ expired upon the cross. The paschal lamb, the scape goat, the red heifer, as well as the daily morning and evening sacrifices, all had direct reference to him, and were "a shadow of good things to come," which things are realized in the atonement and mediation of Christ. The expiatory character of the death of

Christ was recognised by all the prophets. Did not David speak of the sufferings of Christ? Was it not from David that the Saviour quoted one of the last expressions that fell from his lips? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Did not Isaiah speak of him who was to be "wounded for our transgressions," and "bruised for our iniquities," upon whom our chastisement was to be laid, and by whose stripes we were to be healed; who was to "bear the sins of many," and "make intercession for transgressors?" Did not Daniel testify that the Messiah should be "cut off, but not for himself;" that he should "make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness?" Did not Zechariah tell of him who was to be pierced, on whom the Jews were to look, "as one in bitterness for his first-born?" Thus along the whole tract of revelation, from the first age of the world, we perceive the great Redeemer of the human race hastening forward, through successive scenes of symbolic instruction, of typical representation, and of prophetic discovery, to that eventful era in the progress of time, regarded by infinite wisdom as the maturity of preceding ages, and the proper and appointed period for bringing the great plan of human redemption to its full perfection. When that period arrived, he, who had so long been concealed under the veil of mysterious allusions, was manifested in his true redeeming character, "the seed of the woman" in "the form of a servant;" and, with unshrinking step, did he proceed from one stage of his debasement and suffering to another, until he approached the consummation of his great work. And when amid the preternatural darkness of the ninth hour, and upon the cross, the Redeemer cried to his offended God, and gave up the ghost, he concentrated, and bore, and quenched within himself, that fire which justice had lighted up when Adam fell, and which had run along the surface of the earth, finding fresh fuel in every folly and crime of man; and which, if it had not been

for his interposition, would have reduced the habitation of our race to ruin, and have involved us all in one universal destruction. Then did our gracious Redeemer endure the punishment which, in the justice or the judgment of God, was due unto sin, and die "the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God." In this strain the inspired writers of the new testament every where speak of the sufferings of Christ. It is frequently and strenuously inculcated, that the blood of Christ was the matter of an expiatory sacrifice, by which atonement was made for the sin of the whole human race. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." "My blood," said our Lord himself to the disciples, "is shed for many for the remission of sins." There are persons who reject the doctrine of the atonement, because they think that a being of infinite goodness has a right to forgive as, and whom, he pleases. But we are met here by another consideration; this being who is infinite in goodness, is not less infinite in justice and righteousness. And here comes the difficulty; it is nothing to say that God is good, and, therefore, he may forgive; for God is holy and just, and can he depart from his truth pledged to the fulfillment of his threatenings against disobedience, or relax the authority of his law, or mitigate its requirements, or pass by the dishonour done to his government, and, therefore, how can he forgive? The gospel answers this question. God chooses his Son as the substitute of the guilty whom he designed to save; laying upon him the responsibility of their guilt, and exacting from him the penalty which they had incurred, and engaging in return to impute to them the merit of his death, and to deal with them according to his deserts. And this was done that while his forgiving mercy was manifested in receiving his people into favour, his equity might be displayed, and his law magnified and made honourable, by the vicarious sufferings and death of their surety. Thus we see how the great

problem of connecting the maintenance of justice with the exercise of mercy—of forgiving sins, while the righteousness of the law is preserved, and the moral government of God is unrelaxed, is solved; “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” This glorious scheme, therefore, while it is pervaded by the golden principle of divine love, is yet founded on the principle of eternal justice. In it “truth met with mercy, and righteousness with peace;” and the full satisfaction which it provides for the claims of divine justice may well serve to silence every doubt, or misgiving, which, notwithstanding the benevolence of God, might be awakened in our minds, by a consideration of the holiness and justice of the divine administration. Glorious propitiation! and altogether as complete as it is glorious. The Father has accepted the offering of the Son in the sinner’s place; hence he justifies the soul that flees to Jesus, and has no charges against the penitent that washes in the fountain of his blood. The Father is now the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. “He justifieth the ungodly.” What then shall terrify the true believer? what shall stand between him and his eternal hopes? shall Satan muster up his accusations, and set them in frightful array? yet, though there may be much guilt, “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Does the law take the guilty mortal by the throat, and with unrelenting rigour, say, “pay me what thou owest?” It is paid, fully paid, by the intervention and suretyship, not of a mere man, but of the mighty God made flesh. Does divine justice demand satisfaction for the wrongs received from sinners? It is not only satisfied, but most awfully glorified, by this wonderful oblation. In short, there is a full and sufficient sacrifice

for the sins of the whole world. It vindicates the honour of God's holiness ; it displays his unsearchable wisdom ; it manifests his unutterable goodness ; it gives the most magnificent and lovely lustre to all the divine perfections ; and furnishes a firm foundation on which the vilest, the guiltiest, may rest their hope. The great doctrine of the atonement by the sufferings of Christ, is one upon which both men and angels must delight to dwell. It is a doctrine which chases away the clouds of despair, and sheds around the tomb the brightness of life and immortality. It is a doctrine which has inspired numberless millions, both in life and death, with joy and gladness. It is a doctrine which has given a new song, and a more glowing ardour, to seraphs before the throne of God. It is a doctrine without which all human life must perish, and the destinies of our race be buried in the blackness of despair. Christian, dwell upon the atonement ; there is thy hope, thy joy, thy life. Behold the Lamb of God, bearing the sin of the world, and thine among the rest. Contemplate this love in its manifestations to yourself. What were you ? a fallen guilty rebel. What was your state ? condemnation and misery. What were your prospects ? "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," and the blackness of darkness for ever. What would have been your lot, if Christ had not died ? Can you survey without horror the doom that awaited you ? What is now your state ? You have pardon, peace, the favour of God, and the hope of everlasting life ; and all through Jesus. Think of the dignity of the sufferer ; the extremity of his sufferings ; and the consequences of his mediation. Think of your obligations to him, and prize your Redeemer. How earnest should be your prayer, that "being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."

He is precious in his *intercession*. His work on behalf of his people was not terminated when he made atonement for them upon the cross, and gave himself "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Like the high priest under the law, when he had offered up sacrifice for sin, with the all-availing blood of this sacrifice he entered, not into the holy place made with hands, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us. There, as their advocate and intercessor, he maintains the cause and promotes the interests of his people. "Wherefore," says St. Paul, "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." And St. John tells us, "we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous." To intercede denotes, originally, to go between one person and another. In its secondary, or figurative sense, the only one in which it seems now to be used, it denotes offering petitions in behalf of another; and in the scripture, offering such petitions to God. On this subject we are aided by the last quoted passage, in which the original word rendered advocate, signifies one who pleads the cause of another, and has reference to a person, who in the Roman courts, under the appellation of *Patronus*, attended a client, and in countenancing, advising, and interceding for him, took an efficacious care of his interest. Thus we are taught that his intercession with the Father is equivalent to the pleadings of a friend who solicits benefits for another. It is obvious that the amount of those advantages would greatly depend upon the character of the intercessor, and upon the influence and interest he might possess. In this view, what confidence does the christian's intercessor demand. Look, christian reader, at the following particulars, and mark the preciousness of Christ.

He is an intercessor *every way qualified for the work*. He is *infinitely wise*. Sometimes a cause is ruined by want of skill

on the part of the person who is to advocate it; but Christ is personally acquainted with all our conditions, infirmities, dangers, wants, and woes. He knows our inward conflicts, as well as our outward troubles. He not only hears our prayers, but is acquainted with the secret wishes of our hearts. He perfectly understands every peculiarity in our case. He sees where the burden presses under which we groan, and the kind of relief which will be most suitable and efficient. With him this knowledge is more than simple apprehension; it is the feeling of experience, the tender sympathy of a common nature. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Having assumed the nature of his disciples, he knows their wants and weaknesses, their trials and sorrows; he has experienced the assaults of temptation, the reproaches of the world, the malice of enemies, the treachery of friends, the bitterness of sorrow, and the anguish of pain. Hence he can sympathize with his suffering followers in a way that angels cannot. They know nothing personally of our experience, of our weaknesses, sorrows, and conflicts. Their exhortations and consolations would be all theory,—they would not come from the heart. Hence the high priest under the law was not taken from among angels but men, that he might "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself is compassed with infirmity." All this is applicable to our Lord and Saviour, "for that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." O, how delightful the consolation which flows from the assurance that our heavenly advocate is one who can by experience enter into all our trials and afflictions; having "been tempted in all points like unto us, yet without sin." Is he not *faithful* also? This is an additional qualification of great encouragement. An advocate might have both skill and

power to plead our case, and yet, through unfaithfulness, might deceive our confidence, and cruelly betray our interests. This is not the character of our heavenly advocate. He merits the highest confidence of his people. He is faithful, and just, and true. With him "there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." His compassion is not the compassion of a day. His bounty is not the effect of a momentary tenderness. With him there is no fickleness, no caprice. He is mindful of his promises, and faithful to his trust. His word may be relied upon, for it has been tried thousands of times, and always found sure. Whoever trusted in him and was confounded? The apostle therefore calls him "a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." The value of his intercession is still farther heightened by the consideration of its *constancy* and *perpetuity*. The priests under the law were not suffered to continue by reason of death, but "he ever liveth to make intercession for us," and therefore he hath an unchangeable priesthood. The levitical high priest could only enter once a year into the holy place made with hands. He could not approach it at pleasure. He could not enter it daily. Except on the great day of atonement, it was closed even against the high priest himself. But how different from this is the situation of the christian's High Priest. To the holy place not made with hands, the heaven of heavens,—the great metropolis of the universe,—the residence of infinite majesty,—he has free and constant access; nay more, it is his abiding residence. The heavens have received him until the "time of the restitution of all things." The believer, therefore, can never have to complain that his cause has suffered from the absence of his advocate. In all his straits, and difficulties, and afflictions, his help is at hand. He cannot knock at mercy's door when his intercessor is absent. His best friend is always in the court of heaven. On this point an apostle lays great stress, for it

is that on which our safety turns, "wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

Observe *the nature of the intercession which he exercises*. Much curious and unprofitable speculation hath been indulged relative to the mode in which his intercession is exercised. Such speculations are worse than useless. The discoveries of revelation on this subject are obviously imparted, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but to lead the mind of the serious christian to a perception of those consolatory truths which are calculated to promote his faith and joy. Though silent as to the mode, they plainly assure us that it is *real*. It consists in his personal appearance before the throne of his Father; in the presentation of his sacrifice; and in claiming the benefits resulting therefrom. It is questioned whether this intercession be vocal. This does not appear to be necessary. When we reflect on the manner in which the visible appearance of the crucified humanity of the Saviour in the heavenly sanctuary must necessarily operate, we shall be convinced that it would be sufficient of itself to realise and secure all the important objects proposed by his intercession. It was the opinion of many of the ancients, that Christ intercedes for his people by presenting continually his human nature before the throne of his Father. Aquinas, also, a more modern writer, says, "Christ intercedes for us by exhibiting, with a desire for our salvation, to the view of the Father, the human nature assumed for us, and the mysteries celebrated or accomplished in it." In support of this opinion it may be remarked, that the high priest, whose intercession was a type of that of Christ, does not appear to have said anything when he entered into the holy place; his intercession consisted, not in offering prayers for the people, but in sprinkling the blood of the slaughtered victim on the mercy seat. As the blood of the sacrifice was thus presented before God by way of intercession, so Christ presents the memorials of his sacrifice. How did John see

him in the vision? as a lamb that had been slain; that is, without a figure, retaining in his glorified body the marks of his sufferings and death. The saints and angels behold them, and exclaim, "worthy is the Lamb that was slain." God views them, and says, "ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Of this mode of intercession, history presents us with a striking example. Achylus was accused, and likely to be condemned. His brother, Amyntus, undertook to be his advocate. Amyntus had fought many battles in the cause of the commonwealth, and in a certain action in their service had lost a hand: he came into court; a large assembly was present, and all were eager to hear him plead on so interesting an occasion; but he said nothing;—without speaking a word, he held up to view his dismembered arm, at the sight of which the judges were so affected, that they immediately set his brother free. And shall not the suit of Jesus be successful, who appears before his Father in that crucified humanity which is a continual exhibition of what he has done and suffered for the glory of his Father, and the salvation of the world? In perfect accordance with this impressive view of the subject the apostle describes the blood of Christ as vocal, and in order more powerfully to affect us, represents it in contrast with the blood of Abel: that had a voice, and called aloud for vengeance on the guilty murderer; but the blood of Christ speaketh better things, its voice is lifted up to implore mercy, even for his murderers; it urges, with silent but persuasive importunity, the prayer uttered by the agonized sufferer just before his lips were closed in death, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Will the Father, who was well pleased with his sacrifice, refuse his request? no; the acceptance of his atonement ensures the prevalence of his intercession.

“ Five bleeding wounds he bears,
 Received on Calvary,
 They pour effectual prayers,
 They strongly speak for me,
 ‘ Forgive him, O forgive,’ they cry,
 ‘ Nor let that ransom’d sinner die.’

The Father hears him pray,
 His dear Anointed One ;
 He cannot turn away
 The presence of his Son :
 His Spirit answers to the blood
 And tells me I am born of God.”

The intercession of Christ extends *to all our important interests*. The various scenes and circumstances, duties and sufferings of the present state, render the wants of the christian many. Various are the discouragements he experiences from within as well as from without. Grace is needed for those diversified scenes of temptation and trial ; but the intercession of the Saviour includes all that can be needed to lead the soul in safety to the heavenly rest. We may look upon his prayer for his disciples, on the night when he was betrayed, as a specimen of his continued intercession before the throne ; and for what does he not there plead ? For our preservation.—“ Keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me.” “ I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” For our sanctification.—“ Sanctify them through thy truth ; thy word is truth.” For an union with himself, and with each other.—“ That they all may be one ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one.” For our glorification.—“ Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me

where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world." Is any mourner so disconsolate that he cannot pray, so bowed down to the earth by the pressure of sorrow that he cannot venture to lift up his eyes to the throne? Let him hear the Redeemer's prayer for him, and take courage; and let him remember that such as he was when he uttered that prayer on earth, such is he still in heaven. What can be more consoling than to know that we go not unbefriended to the throne of the Eternal;—that at God's right hand we have an advocate, and that his intercession includes whatever is essential to our safety and happiness. But how, it may be asked by such an one, may I know that he intercedes for me? You may determine this point by the following questions:—Do you value above all things the blessings for which Christ intercedes? Do you join your own earnest repeated supplications to his intercession? And do you rely wholly upon Christ's unspeakable merits for the acceptance of all your sins? If so, be not discouraged. Christ is your advocate with the Father. He died for you upon the cross, and pleads his meritorious oblation for you upon the throne.

Lastly, we are assured of *the certain success of his intercession*. If Moses was heard when he made application in behalf of Israel; if Job, when he petitioned for the pardon of his three friends; if Elijah's prayer entered into the ear of the Lord God of Hosts, when he requested rain for the parched earth;—surely God's dearly-beloved Son will not be rejected when he maketh intercession for the saints. "I know," he says, "that thou hearest me always." This conclusion is derivable from every circumstance combined in his glorious person. By his essential union with the Godhead he has connected our cause with the attributes of the Deity, and rendered it the object of the Father's pleasure; for in him his soul delighteth. He is called "God's own Son," "his only-

begotten Son," "his dear Son," with whom he is always well pleased. It is derivable from the ground of his demand.—By his assumption of human nature, and his consequent obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, he hath obtained eternal redemption for us. He hath purchased whatever he asks, purchased it by his obedience and death, and therefore cannot but obtain his suit. It is derivable from the divine fidelity.—Having fulfilled the engagements of the everlasting covenant, rendered the display of mercy consistent with the claims of justice, and performed the work which the Father gave him to do, he has identified his success as our advocate with the faithfulness of God; he must therefore, according to the tenor of the covenant, see his seed and prolong his days. He who is faithful to his saints, cannot be unfaithful to his Son. It is derivable from the oneness of his people with himself.—What he asks on their behalf, he asks for himself. Let us then cast away our fears, and come with boldness to the throne of grace; for there is nothing that God can deny to this divine intercessor. Whosoever cometh unto God by him, will most assuredly be saved.

He is precious in *the tenderness of his sympathy*. Sympathy brought the compassionate Saviour from the heavenly world into this vale of tears. His kind errand was to seek and to save that which was lost. When he beheld the miseries of the human race,—the awful dangers,—the everlasting ruin, to which they were exposed, he felt a tender concern for our condition; and though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet, to accomplish the design of his mediatorial undertaking, he left that region of inaccessible light in which he had dwelt from everlasting, an equal sharer with the Father in all the ineffable glories of the Godhead, of which he was the bright effulgence, he assumed the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man, and in this mysterious concealment of his majesty did he proceed

from one stage of his humiliation to another, despised and rejected of men, till, by pouring out his soul unto death, he completed the sacrifice of the world's atonement. The compassion which moved him to exchange the throne for the manger, and finally for the bitter cross, appeared in a thousand forms while he dwelt amongst us. From this gracious principle he wrought a succession of miracles upon the bodies of the sons and daughters of affliction, insomuch that he became eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, health to the diseased, and life to the dead: human wretchedness every where attracted his compassion, and called forth his energy. To him distress never made its appeal in vain. He is now exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high, but think not that he has left his human sympathies behind him, or that change of circumstances hath diminished the tenderness of his compassion. No, his sympathy was not of a temporary character, confined to his personal residence amongst us; it belongs to the nature he has assumed, and is necessary to the office he sustains, and to the various relations by which he is represented as still connected with his people upon earth. The bond of union between us and our elder brother was not dissolved by death; it is still warm with living sensibility. That tender commiseration which moved him in the days of his flesh to weep at the tomb of Lazarus,—to pour forth such pathetic lamentations over Jerusalem, because she knew not the day of her merciful visitation,—to offer up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto God,—to sympathize with the various scenes of want and woe which so frequently passed before him,—to recall by a pitying look his faithless and apostate disciple,—to expend his last breath in praying for his murderers, is still the same. He has carried our nature with him into the heavenly world, and although he sits enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high, amidst the hallelujahs of the blessed, and receives the

adoration of angels and archangels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, he is still mindful of his suffering followers upon earth. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." He bestows on them the endearing appellation of children. "Behold I, and the children which God hath given me." He describes his love to them as surpassing that which a mother entertains for her infant. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." He speaks of their interest as identified with his own. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." How precious are these considerations to the afflicted saint. Oh, how cheering to be assured that Christ is now the same in heaven that he was when on earth;—that the glory of heaven has not changed him;—that when he died he did not throw aside our nature, but resumed it at his resurrection, and still retains it in personal union with the divine;—that amidst the regal honours with which he is now invested, he still regards his followers with the eye of a brother,—of a father;—that he who was bone of our bone, and bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows, still sympathizes with our woes, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. While awed by the majesty of his God-head, how cheering to think of the tenderness of his humanity; and when almost afraid to lift up our eyes to the place where his honour dwelleth, how affecting the thought that there is a human heart upon the throne.

The government he exercises renders him precious. He is exalted "the head of the body, the church." He is not only the king of his people, the master whom they serve, and who will not lay upon them more than they are able to bear; but as our mediator he is raised to regal dignity, authority, and power. The Father "hath put all things under his feet,"—

“hath given him to be head over all things to the church,”—
“hath set him at his own right hand, in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” The power and authority here ascribed to Christ must be considered as distinct and different from that which naturally and essentially belongs to his Godhead. This may present an apparent difficulty, but it will be removed by a reference to the mediatorial character of Christ. It was in that character that he humbled himself, and in that character it is evident he can receive exaltation, and that in any degree less than infinite. His voluntary abasement when he took upon him our nature, in the humble condition of a servant, is stated to be the ground of his elevation to universal power and dominion, and this elevation was, with perfect propriety, given him by the glorious person under whose authority he placed himself by voluntarily assuming the form of a servant. “He became obedient;” there was therefore no necessity to obey at all. But he assumed voluntarily a nature which made him capable of suffering; and he obeyed in that nature, even unto death, “the death of the cross;” in order that he might make it becoming the character of God, as a moral governor, to grant pardon to a whole race of apostate and guilty, but believing and penitent creatures. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” As mediator, then, he exercises universal dominion, and this dominion was assumed for the benefit of his church. He reigns not for himself only, but for us. All the attributes, and all the endowments of Christ, together with all the majesty and glory of his exaltation in

heaven, is consecrated to the preservation and prosperity of his church. As he died that he might purchase it by his blood, so he liveth that by the continual exercise of his mediatorial power he may advance its interests in the salvation of men, as well as secure the happiness of his people, by protecting them against their adversaries, succouring them in their temptations, comforting them in their troubles, and administering to their wants. Well may the children of Zion be joyful in their King. With what confidence may they rely upon his power and grace. How well able is he to give accomplishment to the promises of his word. Even in the days of his flesh, in his abasement, when clothed with the infirmities of our nature, all things seemed to listen to his word, to obey his commands. When he rebuked disease, it fled, and soundness and health resumed their place. To the blind he said, "be opened;" and in a moment vision broke in upon them. To the deaf he said, "be restored;" and the formerly useless ear resumed its wonted functions. To the leper he said, "I will; be thou clean," and instantly his leprosy departed. To complaining fiends he said, "hold your peace, and come out of him," and silently they obeyed his irresistible mandate. To the raging sea he said, "be still," and the winds and waves listened to his voice, and there was a great calm. By the side of the grave he said, "Lazarus, come forth," and death, at his summons, yielded up his prey. But now, by solemn investiture, he bears the sceptre of universal dominion, and hath "the keys of hell and of death." Into what difficulties, then, can his people be plunged, from which he is not able to extricate them? With what enemies can they be called to contend, from which he cannot protect them? What circumstances can arise, which he cannot overrule for good? And how unspeakable the consolation of knowing that the same divine and compassionate Redeemer who suffered, and bled, and died on our account, has the entire manage-

ment of our affairs; that the same love which prompted him to accomplish the work of our redemption still actuates him in his holy administration, and calls forth the exertions of his power continually in our behalf. In proportion, therefore, to our persuasion of his love, should be our confidence in his government; and what pledges of love can we desire beyond what he has given in dying for us. Hence an apostle argues, "if, when we were sinners, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." Suffering christian, you who are deeply concerned for your salvation, and who, though struggling with affliction and trial, desire nothing so much as to overcome sin and to please God, dismiss from your heart every fear; though your Saviour may permit you to be tried by many and great temptations, he will deliver you from the evil of them. You may sometimes be in the fire, but you shall not be burnt: you may be called to pass through the water, but you shall not be drowned. Satan may desire to have you, to sift you as wheat, but stronger is he who is with you than all who are against you, and none can pluck you out of his hands. In yourself you are weak and ready to fall, but he who is your Redeemer is mighty, and he is able to save to the very uttermost. The circumstances of your condition may be embarrassing and perplexing, but he can cause "all things to work together for your good."

He is precious in his suitableness to our necessities. Oh, how well qualified is he to fulfil the office of a Saviour! However great or numerous our wants, in Christ we discover an ample supply provided. "It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." What distress cannot he remove? What desire cannot he fulfil? What necessity cannot he supply? Are we in a lost and perishing condition? Christ is "a Saviour, and a great one." Are we blind and ignorant? in Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge?" Are we tied and bound with the chain of our sins? Christ "proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound." Are we under condemnation? "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Are we polluted? "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin." Are we alienated and far from God? we "are made nigh by the blood of Christ," and "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Are we weak and helpless? Christ "will give strength to his people;" "He is a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in their distress." In a word, Christ is a remedy exactly suited to every want. He is "an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Oh, to the needy sinner, his name is indeed as ointment poured forth, and can give a savour even to obsolete poetry.

"Christ is a path, if any be misled;
He is a robe, if any naked be;
If any chance to hunger, he is bread;
If any be a bondman, he is free;
If any be but weak, how strong is he;
To dead men, life he is; to sick men, health;
To blind men, sight; and to the needy, wealth;
A pleasure without loss; a treasure without stealth."

Thus all-sufficient, thus fully qualified, to be a very present help in time of trouble, can he be otherwise than precious in the estimation of his people? His very suitableness endears him to them. He is the one thing needful,—their all and in all. Every thing they want. More they cannot need than is to be found in him, and in his salvation.

Lastly, *his immutability renders him precious.* This is a

qualification of great importance. Who does not see that without it he could not be a proper object of confidence. Immutability of character, and the immutability of purpose resulting from it, are undoubtedly the only objects on which rational beings can ultimately confide. Were Christ a being liable to fickleness or change, safety could not be found, reliance could not be exercised. How differently in this case would his nature, his offices, his laws, his designs, his government appear to us. Every fresh movement in his administration, every change in our own condition, would excite our suspicion, and alarm our fears. But with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." In the commencement of the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle contrasts his unchangeableness with the mutability of the heavens, the earth, and all created things. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years fail not." It is this which renders him every way worthy of our confidence. Eternity and immutability are written in clear and legible characters upon every excellence which adorns his form. His wisdom and power, his righteousness and truth, his clemency and love, are all unchangeable. Changes may take place in the natural and moral worlds; princes may be driven from their thrones, kingdoms may be shaken to their foundations, mighty states and empires may vanish into oblivion, the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, the sun may fly from his axis, the moon may be arrested in her course, the stars may fall, and all nature become one universal wreck; but Christ remaineth the same. Our own condition may undergo many fluctuations from health to sickness, from affluence to poverty,

from honour to reproach, but this results not from any departure from his purposes, or any change in his character. In his own existence, in the thoughts which he admits, in the promises he makes, in the designs he cherishes, he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. This is a consideration of the greatest importance to every christian. "If Jesus Christ," says he, "whose mercy, and grace, and faithfulness, I experienced yesterday, be not the same to-day, I am undone, for I continue the subject of the same weakness and wants; I am exposed to the same evils,—endangered by the same enemies; I am still, and must continue to remain dependent upon him for all my supplies. If then those supplies should be withdrawn,—if in new difficulties and trials I have not direction, and comfort, and strength, imparted anew,—if in the conflicts that may yet await me, I be not aided by the Captain of salvation, but am left alone to struggle with the enemy,—if he who is the author of my faith be not the finisher of it also, how can I persevere? All such apprehensions are, however, groundless. He is the true friend who changeth not. He will 'keep that which I have committed to him against that day.' 'Who then shall separate me from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.' 'Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'"

If, reader, you are a christian, such views of the preciousness of Christ should raise your hearts to him in gratitude and love, and should cause you to rejoice in his favour as your most precious treasure. In all your afflictions confide in him with full assurance of faith; rejoice in him with full assurance

of hope. Dismiss from your heart every fear dishonourable to him, and injurious to yourself. Whatever be your trials, if he is your's, you are blessed eternally, and rich beyond expression. Who can accuse, if he acquits you? Who can curse, if he bless you? Who can destroy, if he protects you? Live upon his fulness. Be not afraid to commit all your interests into his hands, either for life or death, for time or eternity. He will do all things well; and lead you by a right way to a city of habitations. The day is fast approaching when he "whom your soul loveth" shall no longer be hidden from you sight. In that day you shall lift up your head with joy. With transport you shall welcome the glorious appearing of your great God and Saviour. "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord: we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." But if, unhappily, you have been a neglecter of spiritual blessings, consider that nothing can supply the Saviour's place. Without him you have no saviour, no intercessor, no comforter, no protector. Without Christ you have no one to defend you from Satan's grasp; no one to take away your guilt, or to avert the fatal consequences of your sins; no one to give peace to a troubled conscience, or to give you an interest in the blessings of eternity. While he is slighted, you are destitute of every spiritual blessing; you are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Were you in possession of health and prosperity, still, without Christ, your case would be lamentable; how much more now that you are involved in sickness or adversity. Oh, whither can you flee for help and comfort? You can have no confidence in Christ; for you have slighted and rejected him. He is not your Saviour. You cannot lean upon his arm; for you have no part in him. Will any of the idols in which you have trusted now give you consolation? Will they sustain your trembling steps, will they cheer your sinking

spirits? Ah, no! They are all lying vanities which cannot profit. They are all broken reeds, which only pierce the hand of him who leans upon them. Yet, what you now experience is but the beginning of sorrows. A still greater calamity awaits you. A dying hour is not far distant, and if it should find you without Christ, it would have been well for you never to have been born. There will be nothing to shield you from its terrors. It will wrest from you all you hold dear. It will terminate your space for repentance. It will sweep away your hopes, and overturn every foundation on which you are building. It will put a seal upon your character and destiny for ever. Hear your doom pronounced by the voice of him who cannot lie. "Thus saith the Lord; cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow." Only one way of escape remains. Make Christ your friend. Let it be your immediate concern. And for your encouragement, be persuaded that you cannot seek him in vain. He waits to be gracious. He extends to you the golden sceptre of his love. He invites you to come to him for pardon, peace, and holiness. "The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

PRAYER IN AFFLICTION.

If pain afflict, or wrongs oppress,
If cares distract, or fears dismay,
If guilt deject, if sin distress,
The remedy's before thee,—pray.

Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer,
Trials bring me to his feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there.

“ IN THE DAY OF MY TROUBLE, I WILL CALL UPON THEE.”
PSALM LXXXVI., VII.

OF all the duties and privileges of the christian life, prayer is unquestionably the most important. It is the very soul of all true religion, and the channel through which God usually confers the blessings of his grace. It is God's appointed method of access to himself, in the neglect of which we infallibly exclude ourselves from all gracious intercourse, and every promise of favour. No blessing of salvation is promised but in answer to sincere, fervent, and believing supplication. No man, therefore, can be a partaker of saving grace that lives without prayer. It is, in all cases, an assured fact, that a prayerless person is destitute of religion. Nothing can supply the absence of prayer. If this be wanting, the evils of our fallen nature remain in all their virulence, and threaten

us with all their consequences. Other means may instruct the mind, and impress the conscience ; but prayer brings us to God, and from him alone deliverance comes. There is no duty more strongly recommended to us in the word of God, or in which Christ is placed before us more prominently as our example. It is not less a privilege, however, than a duty ; and he who, either in prosperity or adversity, makes it his daily practice to go to a throne of grace, and "in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, makes his requests known unto God," will, from his own experience, bear testimony to the truth of his promise, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus." By prayer we are admitted into the presence of the King of kings ; we hold communion with the Sovereign of the universe ; we are permitted to enjoy confidential intercourse with Him, before the blaze of whose uncreated glory, not merely the throned monarchs of earth, but even the throned principalities of heaven, are but as the particles of shining dust that glitter in the sunbeam. We gain access to the treasury of divine grace, and a liberty to take freely, to take as much as we will, of every thing that is essential to our peace, and holiness, and safety. We are admitted to speak to the Eternal God as a father ; to tell him all we fear, all we desire, all we want ; to pour out all our complaints before him ; to plead our cause before him ; to fill our mouths with arguments ; to lay hold of him, and not to let him go until he bless us.

" A soul in commerce with her God is heaven.

* * * *

Prayer ardent opens heaven, lets down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man in audience with the deity.
Who worships the great God, that instant joins
The first in heaven, and sets his foot on hell."

But while prayer is a duty incumbent at all seasons, and a privilege which the highest prosperity affords no reason for neglecting, it is, in many respects, peculiarly seasonable in the time of affliction. It is therefore recommended by infinite wisdom and goodness. "Is any afflicted? let him pray." Whatever may be cause of our distress, prayer is our duty, and our appointed relief. This is the universal remedy which our divine physician hath prescribed for all our evils, and which in every case is able to give ease and comfort to the distressed soul.

Reader, are you in *bodily sickness*? Call upon God; beg of him to support you under your pain, and to give you patience, resignation, and submission to his will. It is lawful too, that you should ask for the removal of your affliction, so long as you refer the time and the manner, with devout submission, to God. But, above all, ask for a sanctified use of your affliction; that the sickness of the body may be promotive of the health of the soul; that you may be awakened to a more deep and effectual sense of the importance of eternal things; of your state as a sinner, and of Christ as the only but all-sufficient Saviour; that your affliction may become a means, through the divine blessing, of producing a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, and of causing you to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Or, if your sickness should be unto death, then pray for a readiness for that awful event, nor cease to urge your suit until, in the fulness of a sanctified spirit, you can say, "come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Are you afflicted with the *loss of relatives and friends*? Call upon God. Let not sorrow prey upon our heart in gloomy sadness, or vent itself in rebellious murmurings; but act like the disciples of John, who, when their master was taken from them by a violent death, buried the body, and "went and told Jesus." Ask for the submission of the

venerable Eli, "it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Ask for the patient resignation of Job, "shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" Ask for the confidence of David, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me:" "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. This is all my salvation and all my desire."

Are you afflicted in your *temporal circumstances*,—struggling with poverty,—reduced from a state of competence, and deprived in a great measure of the means of providing for the support of your family? Call upon God. "The world is his, and the fulness thereof." Whatever he sees requisite for your real good he can bestow, and, if you are a christian, he will bestow. Spread all your troubles and distresses before him; he can afford relief and support when all other resources fail, and he never said to any, "seek ye me in vain." If your heart is conscious that hitherto you have been a stranger to religion, beg of God to over-rule your poverty as the happy mean of making you spiritually rich; and your scanty fare as the mean of giving you a relish for the bread that endureth to life everlasting. Or, if you are a christian, seek of God increasing contentment and resignation to your lot, whatever it may be, and faith to realize that blessed state to which you are tending, where poverty and distress shall exist no more.

Does your distress arise from a *spiritual apprehension of guilt and danger*? Painful as this may be to you, it furnishes a subject for congratulation; for the soul that has never known spiritual trouble, has never known aright spiritual joy; the soul that has never been wounded with a sense of sin, has never been healed by the blood of Jesus; and the soul that has never trembled for its safety is indeed in a state of the most awful danger. The deep anxiety which you feel, and which prompts the earnest enquiry, "what must I do to be

saved?" proves that you are in the way of mercy. You are especially invited to cast your burden upon the Lord. There is forgiveness with him. Read your bible, and you will find that throughout it invites you to turn unto the Lord, and even puts words into your mouth; "say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips." Come, therefore, and plead with God; plead as a child with a father; plead as one who has a friendly hearing promised, nay secured; and thus make known, without reserve, your every thought. Pour out your heart; persevere in supplication; "God is a refuge for us."

Are you afflicted by *the infirmities and grievances of old age*? Call upon God. Say with David, "cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." In short, whatever evil it may be that oppresseth your soul, let your resource be a throne of grace.

The design of affliction is to call forth the exercise of prayer. The heart of man is naturally estranged from God. While he remains in this state, the thought of God is unwelcome to him; it exists in his mind as a stranger in a foreign land; its connexion with the general mass of thought is slight and unmarked by sympathy, or affection, or influence. So far from seeking after intercourse with his Maker, the sinner's chief concern is to do without God, willing to forego all the comforts and hopes which he sees some derive from the remembrance of him, if thus he may but avoid the checks and the unpleasantness which, to him at least, it brings; hence his aversion to the exercise of prayer. With the idea of God, however, there is always associated in his mind, that of almighty power, and of an ability to control all events. When, therefore, calamity beats down his loftiness, and impresses upon his mind a deep sense of helplessness, when he is brought

into circumstances in which his own resources become totally unavailable, then, in his extremity, as his last, his only resource, he betakes himself to God. Many will then call upon God in earnest supplication who never engaged in prayer before. See the rude and thoughtless sailor : the usual current of his days has been characterized by folly, intemperance, and impiety ; night after night he retires to his hammock without any reference of the mind, either to the God above, or to the hell beneath him ; and even when the gale arises which will ultimately prove the occasion of the destruction of his vessel and of himself, he braves its growing violence with reckless daring so long as there remains a possibility of escape ; but when at length the ship is dashed upon the rocks, and the rush of waters announces in thrilling sounds the certainty of destruction, then the earnest and importunate cry for mercy and for help is heard to burst from lips, which before had seldom uttered the name of God but in the language of imprecation and blasphemy. In like manner we have seen a family spending a series of years in prosperity, devoted to fashion, worldliness, and folly, as totally devoid of religious concern, and as destitute of spiritual emotion, as if all ideas of God, or of moral obligation, or of personal responsibility, had been actually expunged from their minds : in a moment of gaiety, when all was excitement, one of their number has been seized by the hand of death : religious fear has instantly impressed their minds ; and those to whom the thoughts of prayer were, a few moments before, as foreign as the thought of death, now, in an agony of soul, solicit the prayers of others, and even themselves implore mercy at the hands of God. It is true that in such cases prayer is usually to be regarded as nothing more than the cry of nature in distress, but though disconnected from those emotions of the soul which are essential to the prayer that availeth with God, yet the impressions produced in a season of affliction may be made by the Holy Spirit the

means of effecting a saving change. God acts on the minds of men by rational inducements; when they are dead to the influence of higher and more spiritual motives, he has recourse to their sentient nature, he addresses their hopes and fears; in the absence of holier principles he appeals to their love of happiness, and their dread of suffering, and thus endeavours to arrest the attention, to reach the conscience, and to renew the heart. The impressions made upon the mind in a season of distress may be the result in a great measure of natural feelings, but if they lead the sufferer to pray, they bring him under a new influence, an influence which may give to them a new and spiritual character, and cause them to terminate in salvation. In all cases affliction is sent that men may be induced to pray, and to pray in order that men may be saved. Reader, hast thou lived in the neglect of prayer, and in a state of estrangement from God? In what manner then, has your affliction operated? A trial is never neutral in its effect. It always injures or improves. It is worse than nothing when it sends us to the creature either in a way of accusation or relief. But when we turn to him that smiteth us, and acknowledge that his judgments are right, and cast ourselves at his feet resolved, if we perish, there to die; then the affliction has done something for you, and will do still more.

But a christian is always a praying man: true, but how often has he to lament over the coldness of his heart, and the reluctance which he feels to approach a throne of grace. How many can testify, from experience, that while in prosperity the spirit of devotion imperceptibly declined, so that they gradually lost all relish for prayer, and instead of enjoying it as a privilege, they rather regarded it as an irksome duty; and how often in consequence has affliction been rendered necessary to rouse their energies, and to excite them to fervour. When Absalom wished to see Joab he sent a messenger, but he would

not come; he sent a second, still he refused: what was to be done? "See," said Absalom to his servants, "Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire, and he will soon come and know the reason." And so it was. "Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom, unto his house, and said unto him, wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?" "Not," replied Absalom, "because I wished to do thee an injury, but because I wanted to have intercourse with thee, and could obtain it in no other way." Thus when we become indifferent to communion with God, and disregard the successive messages of his word, God says to some fiery trial, "go, and consume such an idol,—take away such an enjoyment, and he will soon be with me, saying, shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." Ah! how many can look back to the place of affliction, and say, "there it was my soul poured out many prayers to God. Ah! what deep humiliation, what earnest desires, what fervent applications were produced by that trial. It aroused me from the lethargy into which I had fallen, and awakened me to greater ardour and diligence in prayer, and to communion with God, such as I had not enjoyed before."

Prayer is the solace of affliction. There is some relief even in tears. We have been told of the luxury of weeping. So long as the feelings of a sufferer are restrained and shut up within his own bosom, they prey upon his internal peace. While David kept silence, his bones waxed old; but when they obtain a channel through which they find utterance and expansion, the heart is relieved, at least of part of its burden. It eases and soothes the bursting heart to pour our grief into the ear of a friend who truly sympathizes with us, and who, rejoicing when we rejoice, will also weep when we weep. But O, to turn aside as Job did, and say, "mine eye poureth out tears unto God:" to tell him all that distresses, and all that alarms us, with a confidence in his compassion, and

*sympathy, and power, and wisdom ; like the child which sobs itself to sleep in his mother's arms, and on his mother's bosom : here is an asylum from which no enemy can cut us off ; here is a sanctuary where no evil can enter ; here is a calm in the midst of the wildest storms ; here is a joy in the midst of the deepest tribulations. It is said that travellers in Alpine regions, as they ascend towards the summit of those lofty mountains, often enjoy a clear atmosphere and an unclouded sun, while the world below them is involved in mists and darkness, and the tempest is raging beneath their feet. Thus prayer elevates the christian above the clouds and storms that darken and distract the world below. By communion with God he gains a region of peace and tranquillity, where the sunshine of God's favour beams upon his soul, while he sees the thunder clouds of earthly care and sorrow rolling beneath his feet ; thus realizing the beautiful illustration of the poet,

“ As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swell from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its base the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”

By prayer the mind is brought into immediate contact with the supreme will ; the sovereignty of God is felt and acknowledged ; the wisdom of his dispensations, is recognised, and the faithfulness and love of God become objects of joyous contemplation and delightful hope. The believer feels that in God he has a friend,—a friend who will never leave nor forsake him ; hence his soul becomes resigned and thankful, and is placed in the best condition for at once procuring the mitigation of his sorrow, and of profiting by the affliction which has occasioned it. I do not wonder, therefore, that David should say, “ it is good for me to draw nigh unto God ; ” or that Hannah, when she had poured out her soul before God, should go her way, and eat and drink, and her countenance

be no more sad. Let it not, however, be supposed that prayer will operate as a charm, or that it will be productive of instantaneous relief in all cases to the same extent. The preceding remarks are intended to apply to the genuine christian. With one who is a stranger to God the case must be widely different, at least for a time. In his heart the bitterness of calamity is aggravated by a consciousness of guilt, and desert of punishment; and one of the severest struggles which affliction will awaken in the bosom of such a man, will be that occasioned by a sense of duty, or of danger, which on the one hand impels him to seek refuge in God, and by a fearful misgiving on the other, which holds him back under an apprehension of meeting with a curse instead of a blessing, on account of his past transgressions. Should, however, the former impulse prevail, so as to bring him to a throne of grace with strong cries and tears, yet, until he receive into his heart a clear assurance of God's forgiving love, he will be more or less straitened by fear, chilled by doubt, or stung by remorse. Yet let not the most guilty despair, or give up the effort because of such feelings. All guilty as they are, God is waiting to be gracious. To them, no less than others, is the warrant of prayer addressed, and the promise of an answer given. Christ came into the world to meet your case, and to provide for the difficulties you feel. The very sins which rise up before you like so many appalling spectres, you may transfer to him, and he will turn them off into the wilderness, and they shall trouble you no more. The remedy which Job cried out for in his calamity we find in Christ. "God is not a man as I am," said the despairing sufferer, "that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment; neither is there any daysman betwixt us that might lay his hand upon us both: let him but take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me, then would I speak and not fear him." Afflicted sinner, that daysman is your Saviour Jesus Christ. He can

take your arm, and lead you up to God, and put your hand in his, and make peace between you. He can turn away the rod, and disperse the wrath : therefore put your faith in him, and come by him, and make known without reserve your every thought. "Him that cometh unto me," he says, "I will in no wise cast out." Nothing have you so much to dread as the relinquishment of prayer. To give up prayer is to give up all help, all hope ; it is to defeat the design of providential chastisement, and to render all effort for the promotion of your salvation, unavailing ; for if men will not pray when affliction overwhelms them, what else can prove efficacious ? nothing short of the terrors of that day when prayer shall be useless, and when, in answer to their cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," they will only hear these awful words, "I never knew you ; depart from me."

Prayer is the medium of our relief in trouble. For this relief we are allowed to be concerned ; but we must seek it from God. And in doing this we have not only his power to encourage us, but also his mercy and love. Yea more, we have his faithfulness and truth, that we shall not seek him in vain. He has engaged to deliver us. He has bound himself, and put the bond into our hand, and we can produce it, and plead it, and be surer of the fulfilment than we are of the continuance of heaven and earth, "for heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass." Here it is, "the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." "Call upon me in the day of trouble ; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him." "If ye shall ask any

thing in my name, I will do it." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And how abundantly has God verified his promises in the experience of his people in all ages. The sacred writings are full of examples of the efficacy of prayer, and especially of the certain relief it secures in the time of affliction. Jacob, when alarmed at the approach of his brother Esau, and expecting to be destroyed together with his family, prayed to God, and prevailed, and Esau became his friend. When Israel was oppressed with the Philistines, Samuel prayed, and those invaders were scattered and fled. When Hezekiah was nigh unto death, he prayed, and fifteen years were added to his life. When afterwards his country was invaded by the army of Sennacherib, and threatened with ruin, again he prayed, and in one night an angel of the Lord destroyed one hundred and eighty-five thousand of that apparently irresistible host. Daniel and his companions, when threatened with destruction, because unable to tell the prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar, prayed, and the dream and the interpretation were made known to them. Jonah, amid the swellings of the deep, prayed, and obtained deliverance "from the belly of hell." Nineveh, warned by the prophet of impending ruin, prayed, and God turned aside the half-descending stroke. Peter was thrown into prison by Herod; the church of God prayed without ceasing for his deliverance, and their prayer was more powerful than chains, and bolts, and prison doors, and armed guards. An angel liberated Peter, and he became to those who were praying for him the reporter of his own deliverance. Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi, thrown into the inner dungeon, and their feet fast made in the stocks. They prayed, and an earthquake shook the prison to its foundation, and all its doors were opened, and every one's bonds were loosed. Such are some of the memorable instances recorded in the sacred volume, of the success of prayer in times of trouble. While viewing them, who may not see that

“Prayer moves the hand that moves the world.”

Whatever evil therefore it is that oppresseth your soul, have speedy recourse to the throne of grace; pour out your heart into the ear of the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort, and be sure it cannot be in vain. All things are possible to prayer that are possible to God. It can deliver from danger,—avert judgments,—procure blessings; it can obtain pardon for sin,—furnish strength against temptation,—mitigate the extremity of suffering,—sustain our infirmities,—remove dejection,—increase our graces,—abate our corruptions,—sweeten the bitterness of affliction,—open the windows of heaven,—shut up the bars of death,—vanquish the power of hell; pray, therefore, and be happy. To this, however, some may be ready to oppose their own experience as to the efficacy of prayer in preventing or removing outward calamity. We have, say they, earnestly and frequently supplicated for mercies which were nevertheless withheld, and deprecated trials which were nevertheless sent, or suffered to continue. The objection will be found to originate in a misapprehension of the promise annexed to prayer, or of the nature of prayer itself. When we pray, either that some temporal calamity may be removed, or some temporal blessing bestowed, we are always to keep a reserve upon our wishes, including submission to the will of God, and a reference to our real welfare; for we are so ignorant of what is really good for us, that we may be more injured by the gratification of our desires than by the refusal of them. There can be no doubt that were every desire we express in prayer to meet with a direct and literal fulfilment, the efficacy of prayer, through our ignorance of what is really good for us, would become a source of calamity rather than of comfort. “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?” Why, God, and God only. Refer, therefore, your

decision to him. It is your interest, as well as your duty, to leave him to choose all for you.

“ His choice is safer than your own,
Of ages past enquire,
What the most formidable fate?
To have your own desire.”

Hence the prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades is not unworthy to be used by a Christian : “ that he should beseech the supreme being to give him what was good for him though he should not ask it ; and to withhold from him whatever was injurious, if, by his folly, he should be led to pray for it.” If, however, God denies our request, because in ignorance we ask a stone in the place of bread, or a scorpion when we should ask for fish, he never fails to give us something in the place of what he denies which is more than an equivalent. While God engages to answer prayer, he reserves to himself the right of answering it in his own way ; but in doing so he is influenced not by caprice, but by a regard to our welfare. Thus the thrice repeated request of his servant Paul was granted. He asked for deliverance from the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan which was sent to buffet him ; but, instead of removing it, God gave him grace to bear it patiently, and, by its continuance, promoted his humiliation at a time when he was in danger of being lifted up above measure through the abundance of the revelations. If, therefore, the answers which God sends to our prayers do not always correspond with our requests, the change is always for our benefit. If God doth not always act according to the wishes of his people, he always acts for their advantage. If, when we implore deliverance from trouble, he gives us patience under it, and enables us to derive advantage from it, our prayer is answered, God’s promise is fulfilled, and his veracity is free from stain. If we solicit

consolation, and he prepares us for it by increased humiliation, our request is granted, and granted in a way that is more conducive to our benefit than if the blessing which we desired of him had been immediately bestowed.

FAITH IN AFFLICTION.

Faith, like a simple unsuspecting child,
Serenely resting on its mother's arm,
Reposing every care upon his God,
Sleeps on his bosom and expects no harm.

Receives with joy the promises he makes,
Nor questions of his purpose or his power;
She does not doubting ask, can this be so?
The Lord hath said it, and there needs no more.

However deep be the mysterious word,
However dark, she disbelieves it not;
Where reason would examine, faith obeys,
And "it is written" answers every doubt.

"HE WHO TRUSTETH IN THE LORD, MERCY SHALL COMPASS
HIM ABOUT."

PSALM XXXII., I.

NOTHING is more plainly asserted in scripture than the vast importance of faith. Eminently distinguished is the office assigned to it in the word of God. Through faith we are saved. It is the principle of all religion. It is the only medium through which we can enjoy the blessings of the gospel, experience its comforts, fulfil its duties, or realise its triumphs, in a victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is of the highest importance in connection with a state of

affliction, since it is by faith alone that we can be prepared for it, supported under it, sanctified by it, or, that we can realize its glorious recompense in the world to come.

Faith, in its general sense, and considered only as an act of the intellect, is the persuasion that certain propositions are true; and christian faith is, in this respect, a persuasion of the truth of what God has revealed in his word. But though this is the basis of that faith of which such excellent things are spoken, yet it is not that faith itself. The subject of the divine testimony is not like a problem in mathematics, which appeals exclusively to the understanding; in this case mere assent, or a perception of the truth of the proposition, is all that belief contains. This is indeed a preparatory step towards true faith, but it is only a preparatory step, and the man who advances no further will fail of attaining the faith of the gospel; and were he to die with no other belief than this, he would die under the frown of God and be miserable for ever. That faith, therefore, whereof cometh salvation, is much more than a mere act of the intellect. It is not an edifice which can be built up solely by arguments and inferences upon the foundation of historical verity; but must be raised, and strengthened, and drawn out into full and proper proportion by the divine Spirit operating upon the heart. In point of fact, it is a work of the heart, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;" and, said Philip to the eunuch, "if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" be baptised. As the heart is represented as the seat of the affections, to believe with the heart suggests not merely the idea of confidence in a truth proposed, but the cordial reception of that truth,—such a reception as influences the affections and the conduct. Thus the word faith is derived from a verb which signifies to persuade, and is admirably described both as to the principle and its influence, by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, when he represents the patriarchs as

actuated by it. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth." This description shews that while their judgment assented, their affections were engaged, their will was directed, and their life regulated. Were faith nothing more than an assent of the understanding, there could be nothing moral in its nature. We cannot affirm of any thing merely intellectual that it is a matter of duty, for can that which is exclusively mental contain either moral good or evil? Besides, if belief be merely an intellectual exercise, so is unbelief; for they are opposites.

General faith has respect to all that God has revealed in the scriptures, whether it be invitation or promise, command or threatening, prophecy or history. "Faith," the apostle says, "is the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for." It is the certain belief of truths incapable of demonstration to our limited understanding; the sure expectation of things to come to pass hereafter; a belief and expectation resting altogether upon the revelation and promise of God: for as things invisible and future cannot be objects of sense or knowledge, properly so called, these must be embraced by the mind upon some other principle than that upon which the understanding builds its ordinary conclusions, and that principle is a firm reliance upon the word of God. "We judge him faithful who hath promised."

Faith in Christ, or *justifying faith*, relates to that part of the divine word more especially which testifies concerning the person and the work of Christ. It takes into its view every thing contained in the word of God, but its special object is the Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; and in addition to a full persuasion of the truth of the glorious gospel concerning him, includes a cor-

dial acquiescence in the revealed method of salvation,—an appropriation to our own case of the suitableness and sufficiency of redemption,—an affiance on the mercy and merits of the Saviour. It is therefore described by coming to Christ for pardon and grace, for holiness and life; by receiving him as our prophet, priest, and king. It is represented by the significant action of looking to him lifted up on the cross; as the wounded Israelites looked on the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness, with an eye of penitence and hope. It is also represented by an apostle as synonymous with the act of committing the soul into the hands of Christ. “I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him.” This operation of faith admits of an easy illustration. If a man believe that a certain course of conduct will make him rich, this faith will influence his conduct, and induce active and persevering effort in that course; he will not forsake but pursue it with steady and constant application. Or, if a diseased man believes that attention to a certain regimen, or prescription, will prove effectual to the restoration of his health, though its application may be painful, yet faith renders him willing to adopt it, and causes him to attend to it with regularity and perseverance. So it is here; there is no mystery in the subject. Is a man convinced of his ruined state by reason of sin and transgression? Is he anxious for salvation, yet conscious that it is beyond the reach of human efforts? While in this state of mind, is he convinced that it “is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners?” Does he feel that the salvation he has procured is exactly suited to his condition, and is he fully persuaded that the enjoyment of it is infallibly secured to every one that believeth? What then is the result? His heart welcomes the Saviour, and cordially acquiesces in this scheme of mercy. He embraces it,—pleads

it,—relies upon it,—and entrusts his all for eternity to the care of his Redeemer. Let it not be imagined that the view now given of saving faith would insinuate that God is not its giver. He is strictly its author. The faith through which we are saved “is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.” Those who believed in Achaia, are expressly said to have “believed through grace.” Faith is of the operation of God, inasmuch as he enlightens the mind, and enables it to form a correct judgment respecting gospel truths; and also disposes the heart to acquiesce in the appointed method of salvation; thus leading the penitent to place his reliance on the Lamb that was slain, as the exclusive basis of hope. Still the act of believing is our own, and may be suspended, or perpetuated, just as we improve, or misimprove, the grace which God imparts to every one to profit withal. Hence the propriety of the many arguments, entreaties, and exhortations to faith contained in the sacred volume, which, if men were entirely passive in its exercise, would be as irrational as they would be unnecessary.

The importance of faith, viewed especially in connection with a state of affliction, will be rendered apparent by the following considerations.

Faith connects us with the atonement of Christ, and secures to us the forgiveness of sin, and an adoption into the family of God. That atonement was provided, independently of us, by the love and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ; and its general efficacy consists in this, that it opens a way for the salvation of guilty man. It hath removed every obstruction to the free and full exercise of mercy, so that God can now be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Glorious, however, as is this arrangement, men are not necessarily put into the actual possession of the benefits of reconciliation; they are yet dead in trespasses and sins; aliens, strangers, living without God, and

without hope, and in a state of condemnation ; the wrath of God abideth on them. What then is it which immediately connects man with the merits of the atonement ? God is revealed to us as gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin ; Christ, we are assured, came on purpose to save sinners ; he has done every thing necessary for their salvation ; he is able to save to the uttermost ; his heart is fixed upon the salvation of sinners ; this was "the joy that was set before him," and for which he "endured the cross, despising the shame:" but still the sins of individual man are not by this forgiven ; he is still under condemnation, and within the flood-marks of divine vengeance. Where then is the connecting link ? What is it that transfers to him, so to speak, the merits of the Saviour's death ? It is faith. Pierced by a deep conviction of sin, and making a full and humbling acknowledgment of his own guilt and helplessness, it is this act of personal trust which connects him with the great and availing sacrifice. Thus when the jailer at Philippi asked with fear and trembling, the question, "what shall I do to be saved ?" Paul replied, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." When our Lord sent out his disciples, he said unto them, "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." It is also said in another place, "he that believeth on him is not condemned ; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life ; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him." See, then, the importance, the tremendous importance of faith in Christ. It is the hinge on which salvation turns ; it is that without which all knowledge, and all impressions, and all convictions, and all duties, will leave us short of salvation.

So soon, however, as in the exercise of a personal and exclusive dependence upon the atonement of Christ, we look up to him alone for salvation, then the full efficacy of that sacrifice extends to us; then it is that man is reconciled to God, and is at peace with him; then he is put into the family of God, and acknowledged as a son; and if a son, then an heir, an heir of God, and joint-heir with Jesus Christ. Are you saying, would that my sins were thus remitted? would that I were thus justified freely from all things? what must I do to make this blessing my own; to secure to myself a name and a place among the children of God? The only proper and scriptural answer to this enquiry is, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Nothing but faith can relieve you from your distress, or take away the burden of guilt from your conscience. Faith in Christ is that single condition, qualification, or requisite, on which the scriptures insist as essential to our justification. If, therefore, with the heart you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be freely justified from all things. This is a result which neither the mountains of your guilt, nor the natural enmity of your minds, nor the curse of the law, nor the claims of justice, shall prevent. For through the mediation of Jesus the law has been magnified and made honourable; the claims of justice have been met and satisfied; the flaming sword has been removed; and by the sprinkling of his blood the throne of God, once so terrible, has been constituted a throne of grace. Then being justified freely by God's grace, and adopted as a child, the immediate effects will be peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, power over sin, and a lively hope of immortal glory; while the remoter effects will be purity of heart, ability to do and to suffer the whole will of God, victory over death, and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Considered in this point of view who can estimate the value

of faith, especially in a season of affliction? Without this, where shall man obtain comfort, or whence shall he derive

“His strength to suffer, and his will to serve?”

It is the assurance that his sins are forgiven him that enables him to dismiss fear and disquietude from his mind. It is the inward conviction that he belongs to Jesus, and is interested in every thing which he has done for sinners, and has promised to them, which is the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, by which he is preserved in safety amidst the fury of the storm. Though outwardly tossed and agitated, he has inwardly no fear, for he knows the strength and faithfulness of him in whom he trusts, and is persuaded that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him. Thus his mind is kept in perfect peace, because it is stayed upon God. When he is in heaviness, he thinks upon God. He thinks of his love in having died for his sins, and of his grace in the forgiveness of his transgressions. He thinks of his past dealings with him. He thinks of his power and faithfulness, of his word and promises; and these thoughts allay his fears, and diffuse a tranquil serenity in his heart, while he exclaims,

“ Though waves and storms go o’er my head,
Though strength, and health, and friends, be gone,
Though joys be withered all and dead,
Though every comfort be withdrawn :
On this my stedfast soul relies,
Father, thy mercy never dies.”

It is by faith we are united to Christ, and are made partakers of his fulness. In him are all our springs hid. He is the sole depository of all spiritual blessings. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” The communications of this fulness are, however, limited to those

who are united to Christ, and enjoy oneness with him. It is for this reason that our Lord insisted upon the necessity of union with himself. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. For without me ye can do nothing." This union is not merely visible and professional, but real and vital, intimate and entire: it makes us one with Christ. Such an union is not the enthusiastic dream of the visionary, which the scoffer may ridicule for its folly, and the judicious abhor for its presumption; but a blessed and glorious reality, of which every christian has the most delightful consciousness. "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." This union is illustrated in scripture by a variety of similitudes; such as the connexion between the root and the branches, between the members of the human body and the head, and by the most tender and endearing of all relative connexions. None of these, indeed, can convey a full idea of its nature and influence; but though they fall short of the glory they are employed to illustrate, they serve to aid our conceptions. This union is not limited to saints of the highest order, but is experienced by all,—the meanest and most obscure. The green leaf on the remotest twig proves its connexion with the root, as well as the fruit which loads the highest branches. From this union all christians derive the whole of their spiritual life, and strength, and sufficiency; and it is only by faith in him that this relation can be formed,—that this union can be maintained. To explain this. It is well known that the vine conveys a prolific sap to the branches; but it is exclusively to its own branches. It matters not how near a branch may be brought to the stem, it may lean against it, it may be bound to it, or even nailed, but it cannot flourish, or live, unless it be in the stem; but when it is in the tree, the very sap which flows through the one, pervades the other also. The

branch thus lives by virtue of its union with the trunk, and by reason of that only. If this union be broken off, the branch withers and dies; its life is gone. Such is the union of christians with the Saviour. He is the head, they are the branches; and this union is accomplished by faith only. He dwells in our hearts by faith. "The life which I now live in the flesh," says an apostle, "I live by faith in the Son of God." What an importance does this give to faith; for how true will it be found upon an examination of the facts of the case, that "without him we can do nothing." What is the true condition of human nature, but one of moral helplessness, and destitution of all good? "In me," says the apostle, "that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." In himself, man is utterly unable to think, or to do, such things as be rightful. He possesses no wisdom, no grace, no goodness; he is empty and destitute, and stands in need of continual support by "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." So subtle and powerful are his spiritual adversaries, so ensnaring is the world, so corrupt and treacherous is his own heart, that to endure for a single moment under his own guidance, or in his own strength, would be a thing impossible; and he who feels this—he who feels that, in point of fact, there is no course of holy thinking and acting for which he is sufficient of himself, that of himself he cannot even pray aright, and that he is utterly incapable of any thing which is substantially good, without the special aid of Christ,—he who enters the most deeply into this, will feel most sensibly the importance of this great principle of faith. He who believes in Christ becomes united to him, and receives into his heart the Spirit of Christ, as a principle of new and spiritual life; and thus derives from him vigour, and strength, and fruitfulness. Hence he has in him a secret supply of spiritual life, drawn from a hidden source, which cannot be intercepted, or exhausted. He has resources fully adequate to all the claims of his high

calling. The weakness of man becomes connected with the infinite fulness of Christ,—a fulness of wisdom, and grace, and strength, and holiness. He is now ready for all the duties and trials to which he may be called ; there is nothing, however high, and difficult, and holy, and impossible to man, considered as man, and as such left to himself,—there is nothing, in this respect, but what is possible to him that believeth. “I can do all things,” said the apostle, “through Christ who strengtheneth me.” In Christ he has resources equal to all the claims of his high calling, and therefore may dismiss from his heart every fear, knowing that as his day is, so shall his strength be proportioned. Here is the true reason why the christian rises buoyant above the waves of trouble where others are overwhelmed, and where he himself is expected to sink. He is one with Christ, and the strength of Christ is made perfect in his weakness.

Faith fixes its eye on invisible and eternal realities, and by keeping the soul continually under their influence presents a counteracting influence to every temptation. Faith, being “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” gives them, as it were, an actual subsistence as to ourselves, keeps them present to the mind, and the mind under their influence. Hence it is described in the word of God as producing effects similar to those which would be produced by sight. What sight is with respect to this world, that faith is with respect to the next. “Noah, being warned of God, of things not seen as yet,” believed the divine testimony, and faith led him to adopt precisely that course of conduct which would have been induced by a view of the approaching deluge; “he was moved with fear, and prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” In the case of Moses, what could sight have done, which faith did not effect? Could he have suffered with more resolution? Could he have chosen God as his portion with more decision? Could he have

sought "the recompense of reward" with more patient perseverance? He suffered, he acted, he endured, "as seeing him who is invisible," and as seeing the things that are unseen. The same remark is applicable to the host of worthies recorded in the 11th chap. of Hebrews, who, amidst trials of the most terrific character,

" Nobly for their master stood,
Dying champions for their God."

Could they who met death in an hundred forms, or wandered in the dens of wild beasts, more desolate than they, could they have endured with greater constancy, or fortitude, if the world they sought had been continually before their eyes? In accordance with this view of the effects of faith, the christian is described as walking by faith. "We walk by faith, not by sight." That is, he pursues his journey through life influenced solely in his choice, and heart, and conduct, by those solemn objects which are as yet unseen, and, in comparison of which, all that men call great and important sinks into utter insignificance;—those very objects which gave such a high moral elevation to the character of those primitive sufferers who "resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Mark, then, its operation in time of affliction. Faith places before the eye of the believer the transitory nature of all earthly things, their comparative insignificance and worthlessness. It develops to his view the solemn realities of a future and eternal state; the wages of sin on the one hand, and the recompense of righteousness on the other. It shews him the blessed consequences resulting from a patient perseverance in well doing, and an unreserved submission to all the will of God. It unveils to his contemplation "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He sees the gates of the celestial city thrown open;—he beholds the beloved of God enter his immediate

presence ;—a perfect freedom from all sin ;—every painful sensation removed ;—a fulness of joy perpetuated throughout eternity : and this, beheld under the influence of an appropriating faith, induces a cheerful submission to present trials ; for the believer argues, “ I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us : ” hence he is sometimes heard singing in trouble,

“ Let cares like a wild deluge come,
Let storms of sorrow fall ;
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my all.”

But faith does more than this ; it not only reveals the end of pious suffering, but the design of it. It places before the view, the love in which it originates. It shows not only that all is most wisely ordered, but that all is the result of the great loving-kindness, the special condescension of God to man. It makes known the great purposes of discipline it is intended to accomplish, and the abundant consolations which are provided for the pious sufferer. Thus the believer cannot complain when afflictions come. He sees himself in the hands of his heavenly Father ; he sees all things working together for his good ; he sees the fountain of strength and comfort continually open before him, where he may come, and come at all times, and refresh his fainting soul ; he sees a day approaching when all that is now perplexing and mysterious in the ways of providence, will be explained to his entire satisfaction and joy ; he sees an eternal weight of glory following his transitory sufferings in this life ; here his mind fixes and feels peace ; he becomes satisfied and serene ; he not only submits, but rejoices ; his mind is freed from anxiety ; he is “ careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, he makes his requests known

unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus."

Faith brings into exercise all other christian graces. Faith has often been represented as the root from which all other graces spring; and hope and love, gratitude and submission, are but so many branches of that tree of which faith is the root and stem. When the apostle said, "now abideth faith, hope, charity," he designed to teach us, not only the intimate connexion subsisting between these graces, but also their divine order; and a reference to them will serve for an illustration of every other. Without faith, for example, there can be no hope. We cannot hope for any desirable good before the report of that good is made known to us; and in proportion to the credence we give to that report, and the reliance we place upon it, will be the degree of our hope. We can no more have a lively hope without a strong and vigorous faith, than we can enjoy the beauties of nature without the organ of vision. Let faith, then, fix its eye upon the blessings of the gospel, as supremely important, inexpressibly desirable, and immutably certain; let it fix on those great and blessed prospects which the mercy of God sets before us in connexion with a future world, and hope will instantly plume its wings and stretch its flight towards the skies; and as the soul thus rises in the pursuit of celestial joys, it soars above the pressure of affliction, and all those influences by which it is agitated and distressed. Is he likely to be overwhelmed by despondency, whose eye is gazing on the glories of paradise, and while the first-fruits of celestial glory are actually plucked by his hands? Is he likely to yield to murmuring and complaint, or to be carried away by discontent, whose hope is anticipating, with all the intensity of spiritual desire, the joys of eternity, and who is actually in possession of the peace which passeth understanding—the pledge of immortality.

The remarks which have been made in reference to hope are equally applicable to love. We cannot love God until we know that he loveth us ; and how can this be known, but by believing the revelation he hath made of himself, and of his purposes of mercy in Christ Jesus ? When, in the exercise of faith, we fully embrace the representations which God hath given in his word of the exceeding riches of his grace, and of the suitableness, excellency, and glory of Christ as a Saviour, an affection pure and fervent is enkindled in the heart, which at once enlightens and transforms, and secures a full and complete victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. The believer then becomes actuated by a new principle. The love of Christ constraineth him to live, not henceforth to himself, but unto him which died for him and rose again. It now becomes his earnest and increasing desire that Christ may be magnified in his body, whether it be by life or death. He is in consequence enabled to sustain with fortitude the heaviest trials, and even to joy in tribulation, because he is persuaded that the power of Christ shall be made perfect in his weakness, and that his faith, when tried, " shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." He looks upon all the dispensations of God as an affectionate child looks upon the procedure of a father whom he loves, and on whose wisdom, and attachment, and care, he is accustomed to place implicit reliance. His affections being supremely placed upon God, he is freed from the entanglement of earthly things.

" Blest with the scorn of finite good,
His soul is lighten'd of its load,
And seeks the things above."

God is the object of his supreme and habitual regard, and he no longer sees any thing amiable or excellent but in him, or

what bears a relation to him. His unceasing aim is to do his will, to shew forth his praise, and to promote his glory. Is he brought into affliction? he is solicitous to avoid every thing in temper and carriage that might be offensive to God. Believing that he is

“ Good when he gives, supremely good ;
Not less when he denies ;
That crosses from his sovereign hand,
Are blessings in disguise ;”

he endeavours to glorify him in the fires. Observe him at such a time, when thus actuated by faith, and hope, and love. Do the lovely olive plants which grow up around his table unexpectedly wither and die ; how does he feel ? He approaches the coffin, lifts up his eyes to heaven, and exclaims, “ the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Does he take a journey, and does he hear at a distance that death has entered his dwelling, that a beloved relative is no more ; how does he receive the mournful intelligence ? “ The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted.” Does he meet with extraordinary changes and difficulties ? Is he sometimes like the poor ship-wrecked mariner, deprived of all but his existence ; how does he act ? He sits upon the rock, and exclaims, “ righteous art thou, O Lord ; verily thou art a God that hidest thyself. I am as one cast out of thy sight ; yet will I look towards thy temple, for thou savest them that put their trust in thee.” Is he apprized of some approaching calamity ; how does he view it ? With Luther he says, “ come, let us sing the 46th psalm, ‘ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge.’ ”

Such is the important office which faith sustains, and such are the immense advantages we derive from it, especially in the time of affliction. It is that which brings man, through the Saviour's satisfaction, to the footstool of God, for reconciliation and adoption. It is that which unites him to Christ, and brings with it the mighty influence of that Holy Spirit which works in him a death unto sin and a new life unto righteousness. It is that which frees him from doubt, and fear, and anxiety ; which is the source of his spiritual victories, and which gives him strength to do, and strength to suffer the will of God. It is that which enables him to resist the temptations arising from adversity and distress ; which extracts the sting of death, dissipates the darkness of the grave, and inspires the heart, when suffering from the pressure of affliction, and even when enduring the agonies of death, with "a joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Need we wonder that the faith which produces such effects, and with which the most valuable blessings are connected, is described as "precious faith;" and have we not reason frequently to unite in the prayer of the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith?"

Reader, is this faith your's? Is it that which the scriptures describe as genuine and saving? Is it "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen?" Does it lead you to trust in Christ, to love him, to obey him? While the things which are seen would engage your heart, does it lead you to look above them, to set your affections on heavenly blessings? Does it govern your heart, direct your choice, regulate your conduct, and inspire you with fervent love, stedfast hope, and patient submission? If it be genuine and saving, these will be its effects. Remember, that without this faith you can possess no security,—no peace. Till the mind is brought to repose on God by a true and stedfast reliance, it has no resting place. It is faith in him that gives

it solidity. Out of him, as the sanctuary of the soul, every storm annoys, every trifle disquiets, every danger alarms, and "man at his best estate is altogether vanity." When affliction comes, murmuring, rebellion, and all the other evils of an earthly mind are excited. The trials which were designed to correct evil, become the occasion of stirring up other and greater; and those afflictions which are designed for life issue in death. There is only one anchor of the soul sure and stedfast; it is a scriptural faith in God. Every thing else instead of settling will only discompose the mind. This will prepare a man for all the vicissitudes of time; this will help him to go on his way, rejoicing in tribulation; and this will enable him to look the king of terrors in the face without fear, and to adopt the exulting language of the prophet, "nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." O be persuaded of the necessity of this faith; of the necessity of putting your soul out of the reach of hazard. Until you believe in God, you are like a frail bark on the mighty ocean, which having lost its rudder and its pilot, floats at the mercy of the winds and the waves, around which the tempest is gathering, and which must consequently be ultimately lost. You ought not to live another moment without crying to the Lord for help, and laying hold of the hope set before you; then, indeed, if you flee to the mercy of God in Christ,—if you obtain a sense of acceptance with him,—if you have the blessed assurance that you have given up your whole heart to him,—then may you rest in peace; all is well, whatever may be your external circumstances. O, is it not the greatest infatuation and madness for an immortal being treading on the

verge of eternity, and liable every moment to the stroke of death, and to the wrath of God, to endanger his greatest interests, to rest contented and secure, while he is liable to an eternity of woe? My fellow sinner! if you have hitherto professed to believe the bible, and yet with the multitude have neglected Jesus and salvation, learn more wisdom now. You cannot neglect these much longer, without neglecting them for ever. Be then, what you profess to be, not a hypocrite or a practical infidel, and you will be a christian.

But faith admits of degrees. It may be genuine, yet weak and fluctuating. In such case it never fails to impress its own character on the whole of our experience, and if our faith be feeble, so will be our strength, our peace, and our patience. All the disquietudes which a christian feels, spring from the weakness and instability of his faith in God. Outward things are often blamed, and these may be very trying, but these would have no power to overwhelm, or even to distress the mind, if faith rested immoveably on the sure principles of the word of God. The primitive christians could say, "we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." It is possible, therefore, to be in great tribulation, and yet possess peace and joy; and the true reason why christians, at times, are so accessible to fear, and so depressed by affliction of various kinds, is, that they do not sufficiently trust in God. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Make it, then, your study and prayer to bring faith into constant and lively exercise. Diligently use the means which God hath appointed for the increase of it. Meditate on the truth in which faith is concerned. Read the word of God, especially its great and precious promises, in the spirit of prayer. Stir up the gift which is in you. Earnestly seek for the gift of the Holy Spirit; and seek for all through Jesus Christ. So shall you obtain like precious faith with the children of God in all

ages; then live under its influence, and you shall enjoy its blessings and comforts through life. You may have to pass through tribulation, yea, much tribulation, but it will be on the road to the kingdom; and faith will bring down Christ from heaven to be your staff of dependence, and your rod of defence. The farther you advance on that road, the more lively will be your anticipations of the blissful termination; and when at length you shall arrive at your long-desired, long-expected heaven, and "God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes," then shall you experience that patient active faith is "found unto praise, and glory, and honour, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

PREPARATION AGAINST AFFLICTION.

The wise man, saith the bible, walks with God,
Surveys far on the endless lane of life ;
Values his soul, thinks of eternity,
Both worlds considers, and provides for both ;
With reason's eye his passions guards ; abstains
From evil, lives on hope, on hope the fruit
Of faith ; looks upward, purifies his soul,
Expands his wings, and mounts into the skies,
Passes the sun, and gains his Father's house,
And drinks with angels from the fount of bliss.

**" A PRUDENT MAN FORESEETH THE EVIL AND HIDETH HIM-
SELF ; BUT THE SIMPLE PASS ON AND ARE PUNISHED."**

PROVERBS XXII., III.

NOTHING is more common than for men, when in prosperous circumstances, to indulge a persuasion that they shall have no changes. In life they studiously put away the thought of dying ;—in health they look for its continuance as a thing of course ;—in wealth they flatter themselves that they shall never know poverty ;—and when in full possession of the applause and honour of the world, they repel the idea that they can ever become the objects of calumny, disgrace, and scorn. This is easily explained. Present things most powerfully impress the mind. Take a man in trouble, and with what difficulty will you persuade him to expect better days. The gloom of his situation darkens his soul, and precludes

the admission of those considerations which inspire cheerfulness and hope. Take a man in agreeable circumstances, and his feelings will give a colour to future scenes ; because every thing is now easy, he presumes upon the continuance of pleasure and prosperity. The mind, softened down by indulgence, shrinks even from the contemplation of difficulties ; and although he sees before him daily examples of the instability of all things earthly, yet, by a strange deception, he persuades himself that his own case will form an exception to general experience. Nor is this the case with the people of the world only, even the godly are in danger from the same evil. David is an example. Though he had passed through so many trying scenes, the ease which succeeded seems to have erased the impression of them from his mind, and, by continued indulgence, his hopes became earthly, rash, and presuming. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." Hence the admonition of the wise man : "if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all ; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many : all that cometh is vanity." To the same purport is the caution of the apostle : "boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." The caution is not designed to embitter the comforts of life,—to inspire apprehension and gloom,—to cause us to live with a troubled and desponding mind ; but, to remind us of unavoidable calamities,—to keep us from being surprised and discontented when they arrive,—and to induce preparation for that which, in some form or other, must sooner or later be our portion. The following directions will point out in what that preparation should consist.

Frequently contemplate the possibility of a change, and expect afflictions before they come. That change and mutability characterize the present state, is a truth so obvious that an attempt to confirm it is like proving that all men are mortal. The slightest observation may serve to shew us that the

seeds of alteration are every where sown, and that there can be no permanent stability in man's condition upon earth. In our health, life, possessions, connexions, and enjoyments, there are causes of decay perpetually working—secretly undermining the foundation of what appears the most stable, and tending to produce changes of the nature and extent of which we are necessarily ignorant, so that nothing is, or can be, stationary on earth. Nor ought we to be unmindful of the fact, that frequently the most important changes that take place in the human condition arise from causes in themselves small and insignificant. There needs no great preparation to overturn what seems most secure, or to blast what appears most flourishing. A gale of wind rises on the ocean, and the vessel which contains our friends, or our fortune, is overwhelmed in the deep. A spark of a candle falls by night in some neglected corner, and our dwelling is consumed, and perhaps we are rendered penniless. A casual blow, or a sudden fall, deranges some part of our bodily system, and we are doomed in consequence to languish out life in pain and misery. Is it not, therefore, an act of highest wisdom often to take realizing views of the uncertainty of our condition? The consideration would spread itself like a cloud to correct the illusions of prosperity. It would place a check upon our pride, our confidence, and our attachments. It would sanctify our possessions, and keep prosperity from destroying us. It would lead us to use soberly and profitably the blessings we are permitted to enjoy, so long as they are continued: and above all, it would prepare us for their removal whenever they are taken away. When the mind is prepared for adverse circumstances by a proper anticipation of them, it takes away a part of their bitterness, and prevents those violent concussions of feeling which are usually produced when we are surprised by unexpected calamity. Accustom yourself, therefore, to reflections so appropriate and useful. Seek to possess

a suitable state of mind for all the changes which may arise. It is better to depend upon constitution than atmosphere, and to be equal to any climate than to be confined to one. It is better to depend upon appetite than dainties ;—delicacies are not always to be procured, and what becomes of you when these are wanting if you cannot live upon common food ? Divine grace will preserve the balance of the soul in varying conditions. It will prepare you for the storm as well as the calm in navigating the ocean of life. This sanctified Daniel when a minister of state, and soothed him when in the den of lions. This enabled Paul to say, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Break off all your sins by sincere and hearty repentance. It is sin which gives to affliction its chief bitterness. When affliction finds us in a state of iniquity, it glares in upon the mind in the awful form of a sin avenger. We cannot think of our state as sinners, but we must think of God as the enemy of sin ; or of ourselves, but as the objects of his righteous indignation. Such reflections naturally excite dismay. Who can feel himself exposed to the displeasure of the Holy and Just One without anxiety and dread ? This made Adam and Eve hide themselves from his presence, immediately that their eyes were opened to their guilt, and that they knew they were naked. This made Cain exclaim, "behold, thou hast driven me out this day, and from thy face shall I be hid ; and it shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me." And this made the Psalmist exclaim, "if thou, Lord, should'st mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand ?" Oh ! when calamity thus starts up before us, like a vengeful spectre dogging our transgressions ; when the thoughts of God flash in upon us only with the awful attributes of justice

and holiness, the pressure of affliction is aggravated and increased beyond measure by the stings of an accusing conscience, and the frettings of a heart dissatisfied with itself, and trembling under a sense of the divine indignation. How is this then to be avoided, but by timely repentance? Such a repentance as leads us not only to mourn over our sins, and to condemn ourselves on account of having committed them, but also, to hate and renounce them. Lest, therefore, the malignity of sin should remain in your soul when affliction overtakes you, delay not to break away from it by genuine repentance. Be careful that your repentance be sincere and abiding. Apply yourself earnestly to it, and see that your efforts be conducted in a spirit of entire dependence upon God. Such is the depravity of our nature, that we shall never truly repent without the influence of the divine Spirit;—that influence, however, is not designed to supersede our own exertions. He does not work without us, but by us. He does not save us in a state of indolent inactivity, or heartless indifference, but by exciting us to vigorous exertion. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God’s working in us is made the motive of our working. It is the breeze that wafts the ship along; but then the mariner must hoist the sail to catch it, and put the vessel to the wind. It is the rain and sunshine that cause the seed to germinate; but the husbandman must break up the soil, and manure, and sow, and weed. What you have to do, therefore, is immediately to repent and believe, and to do so in the very language and spirit of him who cried, “Lord, help mine unbelief.” Then, when you have put away all your sins, if affliction overtake you, you will have but one work to attend to, to prepare yourself to meet the shock with fortitude and patience. When guilt and affliction meet together, they aggravate each other, and form a burden fearfully oppressive;

but, if the conscience be purged from guilt, affliction becomes comparatively light and easy,—it loses its nature, and assumes altogether a new aspect. It is then a preventive of sin,—a corrective of corruption,—an exercise of grace,—a conformity to Christ,—an assurance of God's love,—a preparation for heaven.

Seek a clear assurance of the favour of God, and of your title to future happiness. This is a blessing of the greatest importance. If there is any advantage in realizing deliverance from the curse and wrath of God,—in knowing that sin is pardoned,—in being able to approach a throne of grace with holy boldness,—in possessing a fervent love to God, and delight in him,—in the experience of abiding peace and joy, and in looking forward to death and eternity with pleasing expectation ; then should this blessing be made the object of earnest pursuit, for all these advantages are comprehended in it. This is the effectual mean whereby we overcome the world, and are enabled to enjoy prosperity with moderation, and to endure affliction with patience. This blessed assurance at once raises us above the love of the world, and the fear of calamity ; for it causes us to rejoice in the possession of greater treasures than the world can bestow, “a kingdom that cannot be moved,” and a hope blooming with immortality :—treasures these, which, whilst they impress a character of vanity and worthlessness upon the best things which the world can exhibit, render light and easy the worst things which the world or mortality can inflict. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Without assurance a man cannot be happy, for how can he enjoy peace and comfort whilst it is doubtful with him whether his state is safe ? Per-

sonal comfort is inseparably connected with christian assurance. This is felt at all times, but especially when we are passing through dark and distressing providences. Without assurance we shall necessarily be timid and fearful; we shall be liable to misconstrue the ways of the Almighty; anxiety, doubt, and suspense, will throw a gloomy and deepening shade upon the whole of our condition, and render affliction a source of torment, and death an object of dread. Oh! the all-sufficient argument for submissive acquiescence, and for patient hope, in the assurance of this one simple fact, "my God is reconciled." It is enough of itself to allay every fear,—to warrant every expectation. May I trust in his pardoning mercy? May I claim him as my father? May I rejoice that my name is written in the Lamb's book of life? Then, as a child, I may depend upon him, and expect his constant help. Who is there that ever mistrusted, that can imagine himself mistrusting, a father's readiness to comfort and to assist him? Who is there that does not feel that a parent's love extends to all the interests and necessities of a child? It is a matter of almost instinctive feeling. We never think of arguing upon it. We take it as a thing of course, and just so do the scriptures take it as a thing of course, that those whom God pardons and adopts into his family are in consequence the objects of his constant care, and the heirs of his eternal glory. "Wherefore," said Jesus to his disciples, "take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Mark the argument implied—an argument so necessarily involved in the very terms, that he has deemed it quite unnecessary to give it expression. God is your heavenly Father,—a father not only all love, but equally all power; and God knoweth that ye have need of his assistance. This is sufficient; not a word more is necessary. He will, of course,

from his very name and title as your father, give you all you need, and do for you whatever a kind and good father may be expected to do for a beloved son. Therefore, take no anxious thought about it. He has made known to you his pardoning mercy, and all things else are but the overflowings of that fountain—the rivulets that branch out on every side from that broad stream of love. O, it is only in proportion as we realize the gospel doctrine of reconciliation with the Father, by his Son, and receive the witness of it into our hearts, that we can possess the temper of the gospel—a temper of quiet thankful acquiescence in every appointment of God's providence. When the spirit of adoption cries in our hearts, "Abba, Father! my Lord and my God," and bears clear and decisive "witness with our spirits that we are the children of God;" when in consequence we are enabled to say, in the language of Watts,

"Almighty Love

Hath seized, and holds me with immortal arms.
Here's my salvation, my eternal life,
Amidst the wreck of worlds, and ruined nature;
I am the Lord's, and he for ever mine;"

then we know, come what will, all things shall work together for good, and however dark the cloud which may overshadow, or fierce the storm which may beat against us, we may say with David, "why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Reader, nothing short of this assurance will fully prepare you for affliction. Sin must be repented of, but you must also know and feel that it is pardoned. Without this, where shall be your comfort in adversity? where your hope? Hasten then to him who is able and willing to save. Seek the blessing by earnest prayer. Come immediately to Jesus,

and cast yourself upon his mercy, and commit your soul into his hand. Do you wish to know how you are to come? Come, as an undone sinner to an all-sufficient Saviour; say with Peter, "Lord, save, or I perish." Come, as a humble penitent, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Come, as a diseased soul to the great physician, and, with the woman in the gospel, say, "if I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole." Come, as a poor dying man to him who is the resurrection and the life, "he that believeth on him, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in him shall never die." Accept with lively gratitude the provision of the gospel. Surrender yourself fully into the hands of the Redeemer; make no demur. When you get the faith that waits, and pleads, and prays, it will not be long before God will hear your earnest prayer, and say unto you, "I am thy salvation." If now you feel that you greatly need it,—if now you sincerely and ardently desire it,—if your whole soul be drawn out towards it,—then look up to God for the blessing now. It is purchased for you. You are sinful, and can never merit it. You can never, therefore, be better prepared for it. All things are ready; come to the marriage. Rest not until you succeed. God is pleased that you should take hold of his strength. Jacob, when he discovered that he was wrestling with the Angel of the Covenant, when he found that he had hold of a being who could bless him, grasped him the more powerfully, and would not let him go. God is well pleased with your earnestness. Take hold by importunate prayer of the same Angel of the Covenant; say, "I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me." Yes, and he will bless you, and you shall be blessed.

In the time of prosperity be careful to maintain a conscience void of offence. There belongs to human nature a sense of moral good and evil;—a faculty of the mind whereby men feel a conviction that their conduct is what it ought to be

or the contrary ;—a reflecting power of the soul, which compares our temper and actions with the divine law, approves that which is good, and condemns that which is evil. While men remain in a state of sin, conscience acts the part of an accuser and judge ;—it arraigns and condemns, and thus becomes a source of pain and torment, inspiring the heart with disquietude and fear ; nor is it until the sinner flies to Christ, and by faith applies the efficacy of his atonement, that he obtains deliverance from its accusations. This alone avails in freeing him from conscious guilt. The blood of Christ purges his conscience from dead works to serve the living God. His former terror is then happily exchanged for tranquillity ; he is justified by faith, and he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Conscience is no longer an enemy but a friend ; and so it remains, so long as he continues to exercise himself to maintain “ a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.” The advantages of a clear conscience are incalculable.—To feel an approving mind,—to enjoy internal serenity and peace,—to walk in all uprightness of heart and life,—and to feel that “ to depart from evil is as marrow to our bones,”—to have access with boldness to God, not the boldness of presumption, arising from a delusive supposition of human merit, but the confidence of sincerity and uprightness,—to commune with our own heart, and to feel that it does not condemn us in the sight of God,—to look up to heaven, and to see a clear unclouded sky,—to walk in the light of God’s countenance,—happy experience ! Blessed is the man who is in such a case ! He needs not envy the prosperous sinner ;—his riches exceed all earthly treasures. When afflictions come upon him, he has no misgivings, no fear ;—he is at peace with God, and he is at peace with himself. With humility, yet with sincerity, he can take his appeal to a throne of grace, “ remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect

heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight," and he can claim, on the ground of promise, support and deliverance, and his appeal is not in vain;—he obtains supplies and comfort which bear him up above the pressure of distress. If, then, before the approach, or under the assaults of trouble, you are solicited to the commission of evils which would bring guilt upon your conscience, remember, that whatever defiles your conscience deprives you of your best security, under God, against the power and malignity of affliction; and like a deceptive Delilah, robs you of the secret of your strength, and leaves you weak even as others. Whatever, therefore, you hazard, or lose, keep the integrity of your conscience. Stedfastly walk with God in a strict observance of his ordinances,—in habitual communion with him,—in the exercise of faith and love, and of a sound mind,—and in a zealous resistance of all evil. A good conscience is more essential to happiness than all the fascinating seductions the world has to offer. It is a jewel that will make you rich in the midst of poverty;—a sun that will give you light in darkness;—a fortress that will keep you safe in the greatest dangers, and which can never be taken unless you surrender it up into the hands of the enemy.

Be careful to form a correct estimate of the world. The great reason why we feel such excessive grief, and such strong temptations to impatience, when deprived of worldly objects, is, that we estimate them too highly, and cherish for them an immoderate attachment. Love is the master passion of the soul, which regulates and controuls every other; and if our affections are unduly placed on earthly objects, according to the intensity of our love will be our sorrow, and fretfulness, and discontent, when God takes them away. Excessive attachment operates on us as it did on Jonah. "The Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver

him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." He set his heart upon it: the shade which it furnished unduly excited his solicitude, so that when God smote the gourd he yielded to the dictates of petulance and disappointment, and said, "it is better for me to die than to live." And when God condescended to expostulate with him, "dost thou well to be angry for the gourd?" is it consistent either with thy reason, or religion, or prophetic character, to be so fretful at the loss of so small a thing as a gourd? he was so far blinded by passion as to justify his discontent; "I do well to be angry, even unto death." Thus if we immoderately prize the enjoyment of any comfort upon earth, in proportion to the degree of our attachment will be our temptation to fretfulness and opposition. That you may prepare yourself to encounter affliction, sit loose from the things of this world. Cherish an holy indifference to mere sublunary enjoyment. Seek earnestly to be crucified to the world, and the world to you. Did you correctly estimate the real value of earthly objects, how empty and insignificant, how vexatious and transitory, you would find abundant reason for concluding that it is not of much importance whether you be rich or poor, persecuted or favoured, despised or honoured, for these are circumstances which can affect us but for a short season, and have no necessary connexion with our most important interests. Our true interest lies in peace of conscience, in the enjoyment of God, in serenity of mind, in holiness of life, and in preparation for heaven. Frequently commune with your own heart concerning what the world is, and also what it will one day appear to you. Anticipate the awful moment of bidding it an eternal farewell. Think what reflections are most likely to occupy your minds when you come to leave it. In what light will your closing eyes contemplate those objects which appear now so inviting and important? What part will you then wish to have acted? What will then appear

momentous, and what trifling in human conduct? Let the sober sentiments which such anticipations suggest, regulate your affections and desires, and cause your anxiety to concentrate in the one thing needful. In proportion as you contemplate the fashion of this world as passing away, you will discern the glory of another rising to succeed it;—you will behold all human events, our griefs and joys, our love and hatred, absorbed in the ocean of eternity, and no trace of our existence left, except its being for ever well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked.

Cherish a spirit of deep humility. If pride, which has been termed the master-sin of our nature, be not effectually subdued, it will invariably lead to an undue estimation of ourselves, our merits and pretensions; and when affliction has to contend with the pride of our nature, the conflict it occasions is generally the cause of much greater distress than the affliction itself. Where there is pride there is impatience, and there is impatience in proportion to the pride. Pride cannot endure to be opposed or crossed, and those who are inordinate lovers of themselves are always disposed to look on every disappointment of their wishes as an injury which they do well to complain of, or to resent. A proud man, when he is chastised of God, is discontented, and perhaps murmurs, because he thinks he has not deserved the affliction. When the good he desires is withheld, he repines, because he thinks he deserves more and receives less than some others whom he esteems more highly favoured. A man of this character declared in his affliction, "God is not merciful to me. Can this be love? I have not deserved what I suffer; there must be some mistake. I must be suffering for the sins of others." The discontent which pride produces may not always be so openly expressed, but it is sure to rankle in the heart: now the cure for this is self-denial and humility. That man is the most secure from impatience who entertains the most

lowly views of himself; and oh! how many considerations unite their influence to induce this disposition. A very slight consideration of our original state as sinners,—of our manifold defects as christians,—of our utter meanness and unworthiness in the sight of infinite purity, may well awaken in us that humility of mind which it becomes us to cherish. Let a man take the low ground which christianity has assigned him; let him ascertain, in the clear light of truth, his manifold defects and demerits; let him lift up the veil that conceals the chamber of the heart's imagery; let a deep sense of sin and unworthiness bring him in humble prostration before the footstool of the divine throne; and high towering imaginations will immediately vanish; the spirit of discontent and impatience will give way to the spirit of devout resignation; and in the place of the language of petulance will be heard the language of submission: "shall I murmur and complain against God; I, who am but dust and ashes before him? Is it for me to arraign his wisdom, or to question his right to dispose of me according to his pleasure? What are my sufferings to my deserts; my sins merit nothing less than the fire of hell; it is therefore in very mercy that God dealeth with me. I should be vile and ungrateful indeed, were I to repine at bearing so little, where I have deserved so much. Besides, the design of God is merciful: it is the advancement of my real welfare, and, therefore, to quarrel with the dispensation, would be to quarrel with that which may ultimately prove my greatest blessing." Thus a humble state of mind will prepare us for affliction, and does not religion require this? Is not humility a habit of mind blending itself with the entire exhibition of the christian character. A greater anomaly cannot well be conceived, than a disciple of Jesus without humility. Humility is the characteristic feature of all who would lay claim to a salvation entirely of grace.

Take care that affliction be not the production of your own misconduct. It cannot be denied that a considerable portion of the afflictions that are endured are brought on by our own misconduct. Disease, poverty, disappointment, and shame, are far from being, in every instance, the unavoidable lot of men. Here is a man anxious to be rich ;—he despises the ordinary sources of gain,—he engages in speculation,—it fails,—and he is involved in poverty. A second fixes his affections on one who fears not God ;—they are united,—and he finds his greatest hindrance to heaven where he should have received his greatest assistance. A third indulges in a style of living and dress unsuited to his circumstances,—and, unwilling to retrench, he subjects himself to a thousand perplexities and embarrassments. The passions of men betray them into follies, their follies into sins, and their sins into misfortunes. Yet nothing is more common than for such as have been the authors of their own misery to make loud complaints of the afflictions of human life, and to take revenge by arraigning its supposed vanity. “The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.” Hence arises the necessity for watchfulness and circumspection. It is not, perhaps, always in our power to avoid those self-procured evils. With the best intentions men sometimes err in judgment. Nevertheless, much is here dependent upon ourselves, and every day’s experience shews that a minute and vigilant observance of our actions, and their probable consequences, contributes greatly to smooth the path of life. These directions contain the substance of that preparation, which, by divine grace, will fit you to encounter affliction ; but to render them available, remember that you must not content yourselves with mere speculative notions, but practically digest them in your heart. It is possible for men to possess clear and correct views on this subject, and to be very expert in applying them to others, when they are

afflicted; but when you come to be placed in affliction yourself, you will find something more to be necessary for your support than a mere notional preparation; you will then need an actual experience of the truth of its gracious power, and its consolatory influence. This alone can strengthen and fortify the mind.

THE MYSTERY CONNECTED WITH AFFLICTION.

Thy ways, O Lord, with wise design,
Are fram'd upon thy throne above,
And every dark, or bending line,
Meets in the centre of thy love.

With feeble light, and half obscure,
Poor mortals thy arrangement view,
Not knowing that the least are sure,
And the mysterious just and true.

My favour'd soul shall meekly learn
To lay her reason at thy throne ;
Too weak thy secrets to discern,
I'll trust thee for my guide alone.

" O THE DEPTHS OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM
AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDG-
MENTS, AND HIS WAYS FAST FINDING OUT."

ROM. XI., XXXIII.

THE degree in which the Almighty hath revealed himself to man furnishes ample proof of divine wisdom. In many instances we clearly perceive that either more or less would have proved injurious rather than beneficial. Were we left in total ignorance, we should fall into irreligion, doubt, and despair. Were we to receive complete discovery, it would

raise us above our condition, as probationers for eternity ; it would prove inconsistent with the actions we have to perform, and the duties we have to fulfil ; it would overthrow the whole design of our being placed in the present world. We are placed here under the trial of our virtue. While on earth, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. Ignorance of the events that are ordained to befall us,—ignorance of the plans and ways of God, enters necessarily into a state where the great test is, whether we will believe, on the authority of God, the things which our reasoning powers cannot comprehend, and which the mental eye cannot penetrate. If it were possible for all the obscurity that surrounds us to be dispelled, so that the works and ways of God should appear to us in the same bright and unmingled light in which they are seen by himself, what room would be left for the exercise of faith ? If his designs and operations could be comprehended by us as fully and as clearly as a mathematical theorem, the mere application of our mental powers, independent of divine aid, would be sufficient for the attainment of divine knowledge, and faith would be expunged from the list of christian graces. We are, therefore, permitted to “ know only in part,” and to “ see through a glass darkly.” We are left in that state of conjecture and partial information, which, though it may subject us occasionally to distress, yet, on the whole, conduces best to the exercise of our graces and the improvement of our character. The remark holds good, whether we examine the system of nature, of grace, or of providence.

The scenes of *nature* lie open to our view ; they solicit our senses, and present us with innumerable facts illustrative of the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator ; but, at the same time, they exhibit mysteries which the wisdom of man, however richly endowed, or highly cultivated, has never been able to penetrate, or to reveal. We have obtained a slight acquaintance with the superficial appearances and sensible

properties of things, but of their substance and essence we know nothing. The minute and the vast are to us alike inscrutable. We can no more comprehend an insect than we can grasp a world. After all the investigations of the wise, they have got but a few steps beyond the vulgar. A true philosopher will say, in the language of one of the brightest ornaments of the philosophic school, "all we know is, that we know nothing." Nature, indeed, distinctly points out to us a God, but she will reply to none of the questions which curiosity may dictate. She says to reason, "thus far shalt thou go, and no farther."

Revelation, while it affords us the knowledge of God, and of his purposes of grace to the children of men, maintains the same character, and mingles, in almost equal proportions, obscurity and brightness. Revelation, indeed, by its very nature is intended to impart information; it professedly makes known to many of us the "deep things of God," and we are under unspeakable obligations for that "day spring from on high which has visited us, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The information, however, which revelation contains, relates only to facts, not to the theory of those facts, or their original causes. They rest solely on the basis of divine authority, and we are left as much in the dark with respect to the mode of their existence as if they were not revealed. How a trinity of persons exists in one nature,—how God was made flesh and dwelt among us,—how God was united to man,—how the fore-knowledge of God can consist with the free agency of man,—how the dead shall be raised, and with what body they shall come,—in what manner spirits exist in a separate state,—and what will be our exact condition in another state of things; these are revealed as facts, and are doctrines which we must admit, but the theory of these facts is utterly beyond our comprehension. Equally with nature, revelation brings implicit obedience to the test. It proceeds

to a certain extent in addressing and soothing the understanding, just so far as to satisfy every impartial inquirer of its divine origin; but, in its peculiar doctrines, it requires the implicit confidence of reason, and the sacrifice of prejudice. If we presume to doubt, or reason, it only condescends to remind us, that "the ways of God are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts."

But the mysteries of nature and revelation are evident as light, when compared with those of *providence*. By providence, I mean that branch of it that relates to God's government of man as a moral agent. This, though it presents many evident marks of wisdom and design, and makes manifest to every reflecting mind, that "verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth;" yet it is every where so replete with enigmas, that the best and wisest of men have often found themselves involved in the deepest perplexity, whilst others, of unsanctified minds, have availed themselves of the circumstance for the purpose of invalidating the truth of his government and perfections. We know that providence superintends and controls all events, that all the divine proceedings are the result of unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness, and that God invariably connects his own glory with the happiness of his creatures; but when we attempt to apply these general principles to many particular cases, we find ourselves baffled and confounded. Many events present themselves to our notice which we are utterly unable to reconcile with the principles of the divine government, and for which we can assign no adequate reason. We know not why it was that evil was permitted to enter into the world; why true religion was so soon corrupted; why, when the redeeming scheme was announced, it was so partially received; why the religion of Christ is yet so partially diffused; why idolatry has been suffered so extensively to desolate the earth, and the mystery of iniquity to overspread so large a portion of Christendom; why millions

of our fellow creatures are every year born into the world under such circumstances, as render it almost certain, that they will never hear of that name, which

“ Is music in the sinner’s ears,
And life, and health, and peace,”

and the mere possibility of whose salvation is reduced to the lowest conceivable degree. These, and a thousand other questions with respect to God’s general providence, are all perfectly inexplicable. With respect to individual cases, we know not why the young are often cut off in the flower and vigour of their days, and the aged left to languish out life in decrepitude and sorrow; why the useful, the zealous, and the holy are swept away, and the worthless and injurious left to flourish. We know not why riches are often given to the avaricious, whilst many of a liberal and bountiful spirit have their hands tied up by poverty; why merit languishes in neglected solitude, and vanity and presumption gain the admiration of the world; why the innocent are often left to sink beneath unjust accusation and reproach, whilst the unjust triumph in falsehood and deceit. All these are secret things which belong exclusively to the Lord our God. We cannot understand them; they baffle our investigations, and confound our reason. Such are some of the difficulties which present themselves when we attempt to investigate the ways of God. Reason, however, if duly exercised, will suggest a variety of causes why they assume this mysterious character, and why we ought to suppress in ourselves the workings of unbelief, dissatisfaction, and despondency.

“ Marvel not,
Ye righteous, if his dispensations here
Unequal seem. What though disorders reign,
He still presides, and with unerring hand

Directs the vast machine. His wisdom can
From discord harmony produce ; and make
Even vice subservient to his ends."

Much of the mystery which pervades the dispensations of providence arises *from the feeble and limited character of our comprehension*. When we consider the infinite understanding of the Divine Being, and the littleness of our own, is it a wonder that in many of his proceedings he should be far above out of our sight? The ways of God must necessarily, from the eminence of his perfections, be mysterious and incomprehensible to a finite intelligence, however vigorous and elevated. In proportion as our minds are filled with sublime conceptions of the grandeur of Jehovah, we shall feel our own inability to penetrate and comprehend his plans. It was by reflecting upon the majesty and glory of God, that Job exercised submission in his distresses. "God," saith he, "stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds ; and the cloud is not rent under them. He hath compassed the waters with bounds ; the pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens." "But these," adds the patriarch, "are only parts of his ways, and how little a portion is heard of them." When we contemplate God by the light of revelation, our lofty imaginations are abased, our ignorance is exposed, and we see how impossible it is for creatures of the dust to perceive the wise reasons of his providence. The mind of a rustic peasant is not prepared to enter into the secrets of government, or to judge of the measures of the state. A child is incapable of comprehending the motives which induce his father to exercise the discipline and restraints by which he is to be prepared

for future life. A person unaccustomed to abstract reasoning would be utterly incapable of understanding the principles on which the system of a Newton is founded. If this is the case with respect to two finite minds, one of which has only arrived at greater maturity than another, how much more disproportionate must be the plans of infinite wisdom to our narrow faculties. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. They are high as heaven, what canst thou know? deep as hell, what canst thou do? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" The infinite superiority of the divine perfections, therefore, renders mystery unavoidable. He cannot, on account of his incomparable greatness and excellence, bring his plans and operations within the comprehension of his creatures. Viewing eternity in all its extent,—having present to his mind all that is past, present, and future,—pursuing a plan which embraces not only time but eternity, which includes all men, and all variety of circumstances, he regulates his conduct by a scale which belongs only to him whose wisdom is unsearchable, and whose understanding is infinite. Surely every person must acknowledge with respect to these things, "such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

As the general principles of the divine conduct are thus placed beyond our apprehension, so are the *occasional motives* of his dispensations. I allude to those motives which arise from his perfect acquaintance with the character of men, and his accurate perception of their real wants and true interests. The knowledge which we have of each other, and even of ourselves, is at all times limited and imperfect, and liable to error. We are often deceived by, and deceive each other; but God is never deceived. While man looketh at the outward appearance, and can see no farther, God looketh at the heart. He trieth the reins of the children of men. He

weighs their spirit and their works. He is consequently enabled to form the truest estimate of their character, and to regulate his designs towards them by the perfect rules of equity and wisdom. He knows their inward corruptions, their peculiar weaknesses and infirmities, their besetting sins, the temptations by which they are more especially endangered; no wonder, therefore, that a plan which is regulated by a knowledge so intimate and perfect, should frequently, to our limited and erring judgment, appear perplexed and inexplicable; or that in his dispensation towards others, God should sometimes shew severity where we anticipate sympathy and indulgence, and confer marks of special favour where we expect the displays of his wrath. Nor is it less difficult to determine in our own case what makes for us, or what against us. Solomon, that sagacious observer of human nature, has justly said, "no man knows what is good or evil for him by all that is before him." How fully is this demonstrated by constant experience. No one can say, with respect to any particular incident of his life, that this is a blessing, or that a curse, till he hath seen its conclusion. You meet with an affliction, you deem it an evil, but it ultimately proves a blessing. You meet with a gratification, you call it a blessing, but it proves the occasion of a long train of calamities. We are in a thousand cases so unacquainted with the operations, tendencies, and results of things, that we know not what will prove beneficial or what injurious; or what effect untried things will have either upon our mind, or our condition; or what influence present events may have upon our future destiny. The life of every man is a continued chain of incidents, each link of which hangs upon the former. The transition from cause to effect is often carried on by secret steps, which our foresight cannot divine, and which our sagacity is unable to trace. Evil may at some future time bring forth good, and good may bring forth evil. Every period of our life is

opening some new page, the contents of which no human penetration can determine; nor is there a single event that may take place of which we can foresee all the consequences. What miseries did Lot entail upon himself in choosing the vale of Sodom, "because it was well watered every where as the garden of the Lord." The first time we hear of him afterwards, he is carried away captive by the five kings; then his righteous soul is vexed by the filthy conversation of the wicked; then he is burned out of Sodom with the loss of all his substance; then he is compelled to mourn over the death of his wife, turned for her disobedience into a pillar of salt; and finally, he falls into sins by which he incurred a reproach and a blot that shall not be wiped away. On the other hand, Ruth was deprived of her husband, and was reduced in consequence to the lowliness of a gleaner; but her poverty led to her interview with Boaz, in the field, and to her becoming the ancestor of the Messiah. The case of Joseph is still more impressive. He was sold into slavery by the treachery of his brethren; but from the pit and the prison arose the incidents which made him the ruler of Egypt, and the saviour of his father's house.

The moral defection of our nature also renders us incapable of discerning the ways of providence. We are disposed to regard our present ease and indulgence more than our spiritual and future advantage. Exposed to the influence of prejudice, temerity, impatience, and corruption, these are so many obstructions to clear perception and right judgment. We are prone to measure the equity and expedience of things according to our feelings, and to make them the rule by which the divine dispensations ought to be governed; to regard God as the executioner of our purposes and designs, and to consider him as being such an one as ourselves. For example, do we suffer inconvenience? are our designs defeated, by some untoward event? we suffer it to occupy and absorb

our minds, and, overlooking the mercies which we still continue to enjoy, and the purposes which God may be designing to accomplish in reference to our spiritual condition, we magnify the calamity, and regard it as one which God ought to have prevented, or must immediately remove. Or, does the Almighty withhold from us any of the objects which we deem necessary to our happiness? does he stay back our hand when on the point of stretching it out to grasp some possession, or enjoyment, on which we have fixed our hearts? we instantly begin to question his kindness towards us, and are filled with surprise and perplexity at the mysteriousness of his ways. Are our affections excited? do they become rivetted on some darling object? then, because we are disposed to shew every indulgence, we suppose that God ought to do the same. We seem to rely upon him for the fulfilment of our wishes; and when his dispensations thwart our designs, we regard them as altogether unaccountable. Or, are we injured and traduced? are we subjected to wrongs for which we can obtain no redress? then we conclude, that the Almighty ought immediately to vindicate our cause: instead of conforming to established laws and rules, we wish him to act preternaturally, and either to confound and overwhelm those who have injured us, or in some way to interpose in our behalf. Thus men naturally feel disposed to insult the Deity with their advice and dictation; and, when these are neglected, when the Almighty pours contempt upon their prejudices and plans, the disappointed creatures begin to murmur, and to dishonour God by their suspicions and their fears. Need we wonder if this is the case? God will not be influenced in his purposes by human passions, or human reason. He is immutable in his purposes, and independent in the methods by which he accomplishes them. His purposes are founded in the highest wisdom, and the happiness of his people is interwoven with the tissue of his own glory; but his holiness for-

bids that he should be moved by their groundless fears and woes to change the course of his procedure towards them. The mystery must remain inscrutable. He desires not to be justified by our reason; nay, he designs by the mysteries of his conduct to confound our reason, and to put to silence the wisdom of this world; to impose on us a humble reliance on his perfections; and to lead us to acknowledge with reverential feeling, "how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out."

Much of the obscurity of providence arises *from the unwillingness of men to censure themselves*. For often those things which confound them are only the natural consequences of their own misconduct. One man pines under a broken constitution, and complains of shattered nerves and multiplying infirmities; he contrasts his own feebleness with the strength and vigour of others, and wonders at the unequal ways of God. But let him ask himself, whether his broken constitution is not the consequence of his own misconduct, rather than of the purposes of God. If a person form habits of self-indulgence,—if he pamper his appetite,—keep irregular hours, and take no exercise,—what right has he, if his health fall a sacrifice, to complain of the mystery of his case, or to fret against the Lord. Among the thousands who languish, the number who innocently suffer is but small; with the great majority, the decline of health,—premature old age,—and the prospect of an untimely grave, are to be ascribed solely to their own imprudence. A second person pines under poverty. He complains of the injustice of the world,—of the crosses and disappointments which have attended his progress through life; he looks at the prosperity of others, and while he mourns over the hardness of his fate, he exclaims, "how mysterious are the ways of God!" But let him beware lest he be found to charge God foolishly. Let him examine whether he may not be the occasion of all that he suffers. If a man fail to im-

prove the opportunities which providence puts into his hands for amending his condition,—if he indulge in needless expenses,—if by prejudice or obstinacy he plunge himself into difficulties and embarrassments,—if by neglect, or by attending to things which do not belong to him, he suffer his affairs to go into disorder, let him not impute his distresses to the providence of God, but rather charge himself with being the author of his own calamities. A third is dying broken-hearted from the ingratitude and rebellion of his children. Often, in their childhood, he had beheld them with ardent affection, and, whilst receiving their infantile caresses, he looked forward with confident expectation, and exclaimed, “the same shall comfort me;” but instead of becoming the comfort of his declining years, they are bringing down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. He is now full of complaint of the distress and misery of the world, and his heart “freteth against the Lord;” but is there no ground for suspecting that he himself is the chief author of the sufferings he endures? If a father, in the government of his family, suffer himself to be influenced by a blind affection, rather than by reason and principle; if, instead of enforcing judicious and suitable discipline, he yield to the humours of his children, and by excessive indulgence foster their corruptions, why should he wonder at the consequences which follow? Having sown tares, why does he think it strange that he does not reap wheat? or marvel, that he cannot gather grapes from thorns? In each of these cases nothing more is wanting to explain the mystery of providence, than an acknowledgment of error. Instead, therefore, of complaining that clouds and darkness are round about him, men ought rather to say, “we have sinned; what shall be done unto thee, O thou preserver of men?”

We also err *by judging prematurely*. In any complicated work of human art it is found necessary to be acquainted with the whole design, in order to judge of the fitness of the

parts. In a scheme so complex as that which divine providence is pursuing, where all the parts refer to one another, and where what is seen is often subordinate to what is invisible, how is it possible but our judgment must often be erroneous. We can see only a little way as to the bearing and connexion of many parts of the divine proceedings;—the compass of our observation is small;—the field of our vision contracted;—we see things only in part;—we see them separate from each other;—we see the beginning; with the past we are scarcely able to connect it; and as to the future, all is dark. A providence occurs; it strikes us; we endeavour to explain it; but we are not certain that we have seized the true meaning. Perhaps, what we take as a whole, may be only a part; what we take as the end, may be only the way. Besides, in the accomplishment of his purposes, the Almighty seldom takes the most direct method, but pursues a circuitous route, including several other coincident purposes, which may, perhaps, be no less important than those which we deem the most necessary. Thus, he does not always appear for our deliverance in time of distress at the period we expect;—he does not always nip wickedness in the bud:—the tabernacle of the wicked is frequently suffered to flourish, and iniquity to lift up its head. To us, this mode of procedure appears incomprehensible, and to militate against the perfection of God; but it will ultimately present one of the most powerful demonstrations of the divine wisdom and compassion. By continuing the afflictions of his people he purges away the corruptions of their nature, and exercises and matures their graces, thus preparing them for a state of immortal felicity and glory. By sparing and indulging the wicked, he prolongs to them the means of grace and salvation, and furnishes a demonstration of loving-kindness and tender mercy which will leave them without excuse, and render his righteousness illustrious in their condemnation. The ways of God, too,

often exhibit a *variety* which is scarcely less perplexing to our minds. He does not confine himself to one method of procedure, or to one class of instruments. He is accustomed to act variously, according to the nature of existing circumstances, and the dispositions and capacities of men. Thus he sometimes does the same thing for different ends, and different things for the same end ;—he employs one instrument for several purposes, and several instruments for the same purpose. In this way affliction is in one case employed for punishment ; in another case for improvement. Prosperity is sometimes sent as a reward, and at other times appointed in displeasure. Thus one man derives from affliction and poverty his greatest comforts ; another proves prosperity and affluence to be his greatest curses. This variety regards the objects he proposes, as well as the means he employs. These objects admit of different degrees of importance, and it not unfrequently occurs that those which are of most extensive interest come least within the range of our perception. In his dispensations the Almighty hath respect not merely to the good of this or that individual, or people, or age, but he views it in connexion with more important good,—of a family,—of a community,—of the world,—of posterity. Thus Abraham wandered in a strange land for the benefit of his posterity. Joseph was sold into Egypt for the preservation of his family. The Jews were rejected for the salvation of the Gentiles. In the same manner the minister sometimes suffers for the edification of his charge ;—the father for the instruction of his children ;—the christian for the conviction of the world. On these accounts, when we perceive particular events to oppose present and particular ends, and not knowing how far they may conduce to general, remote, and more important good, we find ourselves perplexed and confused, and totally unable to reconcile them either with the perfections or the word of God. Such, then, at present is.

man; thus incapable of exploring the mysteries of providence. Instead, however, of lamenting our ignorance and incapacity, let us rather consider how it may be improved; what duties it suggests, and what wise ends it was intended by providence to promote. It should teach us

Submission. We are all too much disposed to resent the operations of divine providence when they interfere with our favourite plans, or frustrate some purpose on which our hearts are set. We are prone to spiritual insubordination, and though restrained by the fear of God from the actual declaration of it, we, nevertheless, too frequently indulge the disposition in the secret feelings and reasonings of our hearts. But, how unreasonable, how ungrateful to repine, when we know that infinite wisdom and goodness have the management of all our concerns.

“ Wait the result, nor ask with doubting mind,
Why God permits such things? His ways, though now
Involv'd in clouds and darkness, will appear
All right, when from thine eyes the mist is clear'd.
’Till then, to learn submission to his will
More wisdom shows, than vainly thus t’ attempt
Exploring what thou canst not comprehend,
And God, for wisest ends, thinks fit to hide.”

What, though we are ignorant as to the present of many things,—what, though our afflictions are heavy, and our difficulties numerous,—let us remember that those things which appear dark, and intricate, and mysterious to us, are all plain, and simple, and luminous to the eye of Deity; that what short-sighted mortals are ready to denominate unkind and severe, appears to Jehovah closely connected with wisdom and love. The events of time are all directed by an infinite intelligence. There is an end, a design, in every movement of providence, and that design will ultimately be found every way worthy of God. If thou art a man of God, be of good

cheer ; every thing in God's dealings, as to thee, is going on to the final and glorious issue of thy salvation—thy complete, perfect, and eternal salvation. There is no variableness or shadow of turning with him ; his government exhibits no caprice, no unmeaning acts ; he is always pursuing his plans with an eye steadily fixed on your interest ; and if he does not explain every thing as he passes along, you are not the less secure. "The clock of providence," says an old divine, "always goes with the utmost exactness, although it may sometimes be so dark that we may not be able to see the hour." In the possession of the favour of God you are secure from all the evils that time may disclose, or futurity conceal. Let us "be still and know that he is God ;" or, if we speak, let it be in the words of him who said, "why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, for he is the health of my countenance and my God."

It presents a call for *patience*. It cautions us against being too precipitate in our decisions, or too anxious to know until it is God's pleasure to reveal. We are not doomed to perpetual ignorance and uncertainty. The sun shall ere long arise, and chase away the darkness of the night. The more perfect and excellent the wisdom of God, the more incomprehensible it will be to us ; but the more secure we are in its guidance and guardianship. The very darkness, therefore, which now envelops us ought to be regarded by us, not with doubt, but with confidence and joy. It will ultimately furnish the most brilliant illustration of the perfect wisdom and boundless goodness of God. On every sealed volume God has written, "what thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter." Is it too much to wait a little time in order to prepare us for the full revelation of God, when we shall see him as he is ? We are not wholly without satisfaction, even now. There are some openings into the dispensations of

heaven. Many events which, in their approach, excited distress and apprehension, and which like some dark and threatening cloud seemed ready to overwhelm you, yet proved to be big with mercy, and broke in blessings on your head. And in how many instances can you look back, and say with David, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted." In how different a light would the patriarch Joseph view the events of his life when he had seen in what way they had terminated, from that in which he saw them when led away by the Ishmaelites as a slave, or when thrown by Potiphar into prison. In a future state, however, all mystery will be removed. The volumes that are sealed now will be unsealed and unrolled in eternity. Page after page, and comment after comment, will be presented to the reverent gaze of the spirits of the just, who, in the light of the Lord, shall be able to digest all the truths that God shall reveal; and while each solution shall add to their knowledge, it will also add to their enjoyment. This will, probably, give all the emotions of freshness and astonishment to the raptures of the beatific vision, and add a delightful zest to the devotions of eternity. This will enable the Divine Being to pour in continually fresh accessions of light; to unfold new views of his character; to disclose new exhibitions of his perfections; and to open new mansions in himself, in which the mind will have ample room to expatiate. Thus, throughout eternity, fresh objects and scenes, never before brought into view, will be continually presenting themselves, all tending to inspire admiration, gratitude, and love; and to call forth the swelling anthem, "blessing, and honour, and power, and glory, be to him that sitteth on the throne. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true art thou in all thy ways, thou King of saints." Until that period arrive, instead of perplexing yourself about what is obscure, rest on the clear and authentic discoveries that have been given of the divine

goodness. Rest on the innumerable experimental proofs of it with which you have been favoured; particularly on that illustrious proof which is presented in the redemption of the world by Christ Jesus. He that spared not his own son, but freely gave him up for us all, will assuredly bring light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and cause these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

It furnishes a stimulus to *duty and perseverance*. Let no one say,—since I am surrounded with darkness, as there are nothing but difficulties, I shall therefore sit down and leave it all. If it be useless to explore, I shall in future use no exertions; I shall rest where I am, and let every thing take its course. Such a conclusion would be equally unwise and prejudicial. On the contrary, if there be an all-wise providence, what an argument is this for the exercise of faith, of patience, of hope, of prayer, of perseverance. The darkness which surrounds us is intended both to call forth our enquiries, and to enforce our dependence on the gracious aid of the Almighty: “it is not in man that walketh to direct his way.” Surrounded with so much perplexity, brought perpetually into contact with things which exhibit in the most striking manner the scantiness of our knowledge, and the inefficacy of our efforts, how earnestly should we implore, and how thankfully should we receive, that divine illumination which is promised in scripture to the pious and the humble. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant.” “He will guide them with his counsel.” “He will teach them the way that they should choose.” But what must be the fate of him, who, amidst the darkness which surrounds him, neither looks up to heaven for direction, nor employs the powers with which he is invested in the examination of his own heart, or in a careful observation of the ways of providence. If difficulties present themselves to the

the most diligent enquirer, what can he expect who brings neither patience nor attention to the search, but passes on his way in heedlessness and unconcern?

It should inspire *a desire of heaven*. Under the divine government every thing is propelled; every thing temporal is rushing forward to give way to, or to unite itself with that which is eternal. This is the development of the whole plan,—the explication of the whole of the movements of providence: what a motive is this to induce us to press forward to the kingdom of heaven, where not only shall the ways of God be explained and illustrated, but where they shall all obtain their full accomplishment in the perfect and eternal glorification of the saints. How valuable,—how infinitely important must this be, when all the machinery of providence,—so vast and complicated,—is employed for the production of this one object. The glorification of one soul is of more esteem in the sight of God than all temporal honours, riches, or pleasures. And shall God thus move heaven and earth, as it were, for the accomplishment of this object, and shall we despise or disregard it? God forbid! Learn from providence, as well as from nature, and from grace, the value of your soul, and “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

It should induce *gratitude for the clear revelation which God has made of the things that belong to our peace*. He has thrown an air of obscurity over a thousand things, but not over the means of attaining life and salvation;—here all is day. He has clearly taught us what we must do to be saved,—how we may draw nigh to his throne, and through what medium we may pour out our hearts before him. It is not a secret thing, but a thing fully known, that “God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life;”—that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save

sinners,"—that he is the only, the universal, the all-sufficient Saviour;—that he tasted death for every man;—and that whosoever cometh unto him, he will by no means cast out. We are assured that through the atonement, merit, and intercession of Christ, we may obtain the forgiveness of all our sins, may become the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty; and being, through the influences of the Holy Spirit, regenerated and sanctified here, may secure eternal bliss and glory hereafter. This is your wisdom; this is your happiness; this is the only way to everlasting life. Apply, therefore, your heart and conscience to the plain undeniable declarations of revelation. There will be no excuse for any who live a careless, sinful, worldly life, and refuse to turn unto God by genuine repentance, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. There are, it is true, mysteries connected with revelation, but they are not of such a nature as to darken its evidence, or to render in the least degree doubtful, any thing that relates to the duties and prospects of accountable immortal creatures. What is revealed is of far more importance to you than what is unrevealed. God has withheld the less and given us the greater. There is no knowledge of any kind that will bear a comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. You are called upon, by believing on him, to lay hold of eternal life: have you done this? Have you "put off the former conversation which is corrupt, according to deceitful lusts?" Have you put on Christ, and are you walking in the resplendent steps of him who is "the light of the world?" Or, are you treasuring up materials of accumulated condemnation, by saying to God, "depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" If, with the advantages you enjoy, you are walking in the paths of sin, how will you answer to God when he shall sit in judgment upon you? "Walk in the light, while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you."

ON VISITING THE AFFLICTED.

If ever sore affliction and distress
Have made thy heart with tears of sorrow flow ;
If ever in the depths of want and woe
Thy soul hath felt, with humble thankfulness,
That Christ hath power and grace to heal and bless ;—
O, think of them, who by experience know,
That all is frail and fading here below.

“ REMEMBER THEM THAT ARE IN BONDS, AS BOUND WITH THEM ; AND THEM WHICH SUFFER ADVERSITY, AS BEING YOURSELVES ALSO IN THE BODY.”

HEB. XIII., III.

THE sorrows of those whom God hath visited with affliction, have a just claim to our compassion. The common feelings of our nature, the consciousness of our liability to like calamities, unite with the spirit and the precepts of the gospel, in calling upon us to visit the distressed, to sympathize with them in their woes, and, as far as possible, to bear away from them the burden of calamity. The scriptures teach us that as the Almighty “ hath made of one blood all nations of men that dwell upon the face of the whole earth,” so it is incumbent upon us to look upon all men as united to us by an intimate relationship as our brethren ; consequently, we are called upon to endeavour to soothe and comfort the afflicted soul, and not to hide ourselves from our own flesh. It is specified

as one of the marks which distinguish the true and genuine members of the body of Christ, "that if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." Acts of kindness, and visits of mercy to the distressed, enter so essentially into the religion of the gospel,—a religion which is, in its origin, its effects, its principles, and precepts, a system of charity,—a religion which, originating in the love of God, proposes to restore to happiness and dignity those who are "poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked," that they are affirmed to be the amount and the criterion of a genuine profession. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction;" and accordingly we find, that wherever the power of the gospel has been experienced, and its spirit imbibed, the heart has been inspired with tender compassion, and works of disinterested liberality have abounded. This was its novel and astonishing effect at the commencement of its promulgation; "and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed were his own, but they had all things in common." And St. Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, says of the Macedonians, that "in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." A christian is called upon to shew mercy to others on the ground that he has received mercy of the Lord. In addition to innumerable other acts of his favour, God has bestowed upon him the infinitely richer blessings of pardon and grace. For him he bowed the heavens and came down; for him the great sacrifice was offered on Calvary, in virtue of which he is alone entitled to lift up his head, and to rejoice in a sense of sins forgiven. And as he lives from day to day, his unworthiness and guilt render fresh acts of mercy necessary for his safety. Is it for him then, who participates so largely of the mercy of

heaven, to be unmindful of the wants and woes of his fellows? Where, then, is reason; where is gratitude; where the smallest sense of his infinite and eternal obligations? Can he be indifferent to the miseries of others, when his own have awakened attention in the world above, and on him heaven has poured the choicest stores of mercy? Surely, it must be instantly seen, that "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long suffering," ought to characterize the professor of the gospel. Living himself upon mercy, mercy ought to be the prominent attribute of his character, the guide of his thoughts, the director of his path, the steward of all his goods. Among the several offices of christian duty, the performance or the neglect of which is represented by our Lord as influencing the sentence to be passed upon each of us at the last day, a prominent place is assigned to attention to the wants and sufferings of the afflicted. "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Further:—what noble examples are placed before us to engage our imitation. Paul could say, "who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;" and David could say, even of those who rewarded him evil for good, "when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting: I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily as one that mourneth for his mother." How beautiful was the sympathy which was expressed to Job at the close of his captivity. As he had experienced how much the harsh reflections of friends and neighbours could embitter his calamity, so he felt how much it could be alleviated by their kindness. "Then came to him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and

all they who had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house; and they bemoaned him, and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an ear-ring of gold." Think too of the example of him who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows; in whom every mourner saw the meltings of pity, and the kindness of friendship. Benevolence was the garb in which all his other virtues were arrayed—the soft lustre with which they were surrounded and adorned. His miracles were miracles of mercy and kindness. He went about doing good. Love to the bodies and souls of men glowed in the whole of his words, and thoughts, and conduct. He had compassion on the multitude, who, if he had dismissed them fasting, would have fainted by the way. He healed the body while he instructed the soul. He opened the eyes of the blind, and bade the lame rise up and walk. He pitied the destitution of Martha and Mary, and raised their brother from the tomb. He compassionated the widow in her affliction, and gave back her son to her embrace. Man in misery was a spectacle which he could never behold unmoved; and to behold it, and to relieve it, was the object of his embassy to earth, and of his residence among us. By example, therefore, as well as by precept, he hath taught us to visit and comfort the afflicted. By this we obtain a near resemblance to the Divine Being. Christians are enjoined to be merciful as their Father in heaven is merciful, to imitate that God who is a strength to the needy in their distress; a strength to the poor; "a refuge from the storm; a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the walls." He is called "the father of mercies;" an expression which strikingly intimates the mercifulness of his nature; and therefore an apostle, in calling upon christians to be followers, or imitators of God, as dear children, wisely intersperses his remarks with an exhortation to mutual

love, and kindness, and forbearance. Various are the cases of distress which call for the exercise of christian commiseration, We see our brethren bending as they travel along, but every one stoops under the pressure of a different burden. One complains of unkindness, another of desertion and injury. One is oppressed with care, another is stung with disappointment. The heart of some is wounded, of others the conscience ; with some the body is sick, with others the mind. Different diseases require different treatment ; and, under a general obligation to aid the distressed, our assistance ought to vary with the nature of the burden they sustain.

In ministering to their distress you may do much for the *mind*. Is the sufferer destitute of religion ? The season is favourable for impressing upon the heart the great truths of salvation, and for awakening and strengthening religious impressions. The hours of grief and misfortune are often the hours of penitence. These are messengers sent of God to the soul, and the result may be to carry home to the heart that message which in more prosperous and joyous seasons has been blindly disregarded. Now the heart is made soft, and the ear which had despised reproof is open to instruction. Of such a season, therefore, the christian ought to avail himself, that he may impart spiritual relief. It is for those who are thoughtless about their own souls to confine their mercy to the temporal condition of others ; but the man whose eye has been fixed upon the immortal part of our nature, and who beholds it in the light which revelation pours upon it, will make all his attempts to benefit the earthly and perishing part subservient to his endeavours to restore, as an instrument, spiritual life and health to the undying principle. While, therefore, you sit by the side of the sick bed, and wipe the tear of sorrow from the eye of the sufferer, labour to turn his mind inward upon itself, that it may perceive its guilt and pollution, and that, excited by the discovery, he may appreciate and welcome

the Saviour who is disclosed to us in the scriptures. Or, if his conscience smite, and his wounded spirit perceive a connexion between his guilt and his suffering, then be your's the pleasing task to substitute hope for despondency, peace for alarm. Tell him of a Saviour for the chief of sinners; tell him of a blood that cleanseth from all unrighteousness; tell him of a grace efficacious and powerful as it is free; tell him of a father more willing to receive the returning prodigal than the prodigal himself is to return. But is the sufferer a christian? Still you may do much for his mind, by dissipating his doubts, removing his fears, and bringing him comfort in his spiritual distresses. Thus Jonathan went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hands in God. A christian is self-suspicious, and is afraid of every conclusion in his own favour drawn by himself. He sees not the consolation to which he is entitled, though so near to him; but another, like the angel sent to Hagar in the wilderness, may open his eyes and shew him the well. Sometimes he is cast down, supposing that what he experiences is peculiar to himself,—that none were ever exercised as he is; but you can relieve him, by referring him to the experience of others, or by opening your own, and thus giving him to see that no temptations have overtaken him but such as are common to men. There is, also, another important case. An apostle refers to it when he says, “brethren, if a man be overtaken with a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one, in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

You may do much for the *body*. You cannot perform miracles like the Saviour, but you may be useful by procuring medical aid, and by personal attendance and succour. Where the malady cannot be removed it may be alleviated. You may sympathize with the sufferer in his distress, and weep with him when he weeps;—you may suggest to him those consolations that may reconcile him to his lot;—you may

teach him to improve the dispensations of heaven by faith and trust, by patience, humility, and deadness to the world ;— you may open to him those abundant sources of consolation which the word of God supplies in its promises and in its prospects ; and especially may you direct his views beyond this vale of tears to that happy land, where the saints of God, delivered from tribulation, “ shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Is it nothing to the patient that you visit him in his affliction ; that he sees you at the side of the bed of languishing ; that he receives from you the look of sympathy and kindness, the soothing expression, the word of counsel and of comfort ; that by your tears and prayers you are answering to the address, “ pity me, pity me, O ye, my friends ! for the hand of God, hath touched me ? ”

The *estate* of the afflicted may require assistance, and is to be relieved according to our ability. To deal our bread to the hungry, to relieve the oppressed, to provide a shelter for the homeless, to assist the unfortunate in their attempts, by other methods, to support their families, are the deeds of sympathy which prove it to be genuine, and without which its profession is a mere pretence. How just, how forcible, is the interrogation of the apostle, “ whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ? ” Nothing can be more absurd than those professions of love and good-will which are not supported by exertions to relieve those whom we profess to pity. A christian’s charity is a principle that prompts him to activity and diligence in seeking redress for the miserable,—a principle fertile in its contrivances, and resolute in its executions. It en-

larges his own means of beneficence by making him a suppliant to the more wealthy in behalf of the poor. It abridges his own enjoyments for the sake of multiplying his means of usefulness, and incites to exertion for the same purpose. So powerfully did this holy passion operate in the first ages of the church, that many of the rich christians sold their estates and shared their affluence with the poor. What rendered this act the more remarkable was, that it was purely voluntary. It is not our duty, any more than it was their's, to go this length; still, however, it is evident, both from general principles, as well as from particular precepts, that we ought to do every thing in our power in behalf of the distressed. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth. Thou shalt surely give him, and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest." "Charge them that be rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."

Say not, that there are many to whom you cannot thus render your assistance, for they have brought their calamities upon themselves. It ought to be considered that all our miseries are the results of sin, and that the best of men cannot assert in the evil day that they are guiltless. It may be the design of heaven, in what you rashly call the judgments of God, to bring them to repentance; and by the visit of mercy,—the word in season,—the expression of sympathy, you may promote that design, and become instrumental in converting the sinner from the error of his ways. Compassion for the sinner is quite reconcileable with abhorrence of his crimes,

and your solicitude that their correction may yield "the peaceable fruits of righteousness," may dispose to serious thought and feeling those whom coldness and harshness would have made utterly obdurate. Say not again, that among those who suffer there are some who have most unjustly and unwarrantably proved themselves your enemies; for even in this case the gospel allows not the suppression of christian charity. It is one, indeed, which supplies a fair test of principle. Nature may prompt us to relieve those who have never offended us, but grace only triumphs over all the sentiments of revenge, and makes us fly to the relief of a fallen foe. It is thus we take for our model the divine conduct, and adopt that method of subduing enmity, which was unknown to the world until Christ taught it by his doctrine, and exemplified it by his conduct. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." The same sentiments are taught by the apostle. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Various are the motives which urge us to the performance of this important branch of christian duty arising from the consideration of our own personal advantage, and which serve to shew that we benefit ourselves in the same proportion that we endeavour to aid the needy in their distress.

Hereby *we minister to our own enjoyment*. We read of the luxury of doing good. The very act of kindness is accompanied with the most refined complacency. "The good man," says Solomon, "shall be satisfied from himself." He refers not to the pride of self-flattery, but to the testimony of a good conscience. The pleasures resulting from christian kindness and benevolence are of a nature peculiarly refined and exalted, because they spring from a consciousness of well-doing. Self-satisfaction, without having the moral sense exercised to discern between good and evil, is an unenviable and despicable enjoyment. If we feel and think with any degree of justness respecting right and wrong, every sinful pursuit and pleasure must be mixed with disapprobation and painful apprehension. On the contrary, the due exercise of our moral powers supposes a regularity and subordination in all the parts of our spiritual constitution, which, in the nature of things, is inseparable from enjoyment. In this, indeed, all proper mental enjoyment consists. If it is pleasing to observe the order and harmony which pervade all the operations of the natural world, much more to perceive in ourselves the existence of a moral harmony regulating all our affairs, and directing them to their proper objects. In ministering to the afflicted, for example, how can any unpleasing sensation arise in the mind, when every disposition excited is marked with gentleness, amiableness, and kindness, and by a conformity to the precepts and example of the Redeemer? It is an evidence that we have not believed in vain, and that we have been renewed in the image of our minds. Many seem afraid of this species of enjoyment, and count all delight but that of faith to be a mere effervescence of self-righteousness, which only produces spiritual pride. Why then has our Lord pronounced his seven-fold beatitude on the graces of a renewed mind? Why has he so solemnly connected happiness with holiness? The angels are happy because they are

holy. The felicity of heaven is the perfection of holiness. In proportion, therefore, as we give up ourselves to the influence and government of christian charity, we approach to the felicity of the heavenly world. This happiness is enhanced by the good we are instrumental in effecting. The sensibility which causes us to sympathize with the sorrows of the afflicted renders us equally susceptible of their joys ; and how delightful the pleasures which we thus receive. Sweet is the opening of spring ; to mark the sterile winter putting forth the promise of fruitfulness,—the cheerless trees mantling themselves with foliage,—the herbage shooting out its tender blade,—the flower opening its beauties,—and the birds resuming their sprightliness and song ; but how inferior such pleasures when compared with that which arises from the contemplation of a withered family reviving,—the glow of health returning on the emaciated cheek,—peace and joy lighting up the eye which had been overcast with gloom and despondency,—and vivacity animating the tongue that had long uttered only dejection and mourning ; and how much is the pleasure increased when we can reflect that, instrumentally, it is our own work ; and when the tearful eye is turned to us with overflowing gratitude, and the swelling heart pours forth a tide of thankfulness on account of our work of faith and labour of love. This affords the purest and liveliest joy that can thrill through the human heart. This happiness Job has described in glowing terms ; “ when the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me ; because I delivered the poor and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing with joy.”

It will secure for us suitable sympathy in the day of calamity. The vicissitudes of life forbid any man from concluding, whatever be his present circumstances, that he shall

never stand in need of the help of others. What, though like Job, he wash his steps in butter, and the rocks pour him out rivers of oil, yet, like him, he may be the subject of those ruinous disasters which no shrewdness could foresee, and against which no vigilance could provide. Let us suppose, however, that he has been kind and benevolent in the days of his prosperity,—that he has dealt his bread to the hungry, ministered to the sick, visited the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and that along with temporal blessings he has dispensed the higher blessings of the gospel, pouring out with every sacrifice of benevolence the “wine of the kingdom;” will not the kindness he has shown to others be a loadstone to attract their hearts to him? and will he not receive back, in a full tide, the streams of consolation which had ebbed from his own heart, to fill the empty channels of his neighbours’ happiness? Who can be unkind to him who has been kind to all? What heart so cruel as to refuse to sympathize with him who, like his divine master, has gone about doing good? For him the face of pity will exhibit its softest expression, and to him the voice of love will utter its sweetest consolations. Even those who have not been befriended by him will be touched with pity for him. Such a man in distress interests all hearts in his favour; he is a vessel foundering which had been employed in succouring and rescuing the famished and the drowning. But should it so occur that he should look in vain for some one to pity and relieve him, will he fail to receive the more ample testimony of his sympathy, who is the “God of all comfort?” “Blessed is the man that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in the day of trouble.” “Consider the poor, and the Lord will strengthen thee on thy bed of languishing.” “When thou seest the naked, cover him; hide not thyself from thine own flesh; then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee;

and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, here am I."

It will contribute to your spiritual instruction and improvement. "It is better," says the wise man, "to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." He does not represent sorrow as a state more eligible than joy; he considers the sadness which is induced by the contemplation of scenes of affliction in the light of discipline only. He views it with reference to an end. He compares it with certain improvements which he supposes it to produce, and which he regards as far outweighing in value every fleeting sensation of joy. It contributes to our improvement by the impressive views we derive from scenes of affliction.

They teach us *the evil of sin*. In a world where temptations to sin so extensively abound, where every situation, and object, and relation, hides innumerable dangers, we cannot have too deep an impression of its evil nature, and fearful consequences. In proportion as our minds are affected by the consideration of its exceeding sinfulness, and of the calamitous effects it has produced, and which are, after all, only a presage of the still greater woes that await the impenitent in the world to come, we shall be induced to view it with abhorrence, and to watch against its temptations. And what so likely to excite such considerations as the dwelling of affliction? O, is it possible to enter the house of mourning, —to take our station at the bed side of the sick and dying,

"That post of observation, darker every hour,"—

to behold all the solemn apparatus of death,—the darkened room,—the whispering attendants,—the weeping friends,—the thrilling pains, which medicine cannot alleviate,—the

shortened breath,—the struggle for life,—the glazed eye,—and at length the lifeless corpse, and reflect as we survey the scene, all this is the work of sin ! such are the miseries it has entailed upon our race!—and not execrate an evil which has occasioned so much misery,—not resolve to pluck up the root of bitterness ?

They teach us *the vanity of the world*. The world is ever an ensnaring object to a christian, and the danger increases in proportion as he is indulged with prosperity and ease. When his life continues to flow on in one smooth current, unruffled by any calamity ; when, happy in himself, he sees nothing but what is agreeable around him ; how liable is he to forget that this is not his rest, that here he is only “ a stranger and sojourner ;” and how soon does his heart begin to cleave to the dust. What then so likely to contribute to his security, as frequent visits to the house of mourning ? When some affecting scene of misery presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of earthly joy, and rouses our sensibility of earthly woe ; when we see some who were once prosperous and happy, sunk by unexpected calamities into poverty and distress ; or when in sad silence we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, and see him stretched on the bed of death, then the world begins to appear in a new light ; its instability and vanity impress themselves with irresistible conviction upon our minds ; we are led to feel by what a frail tenure we hold our possessions here ; our desires and expectations of earthly bliss are restrained and modified ; and we are taught to “ rejoice as though we rejoiced not ;” and to “ weep as though we wept not ;” that is, neither in grief nor in joy to run to excess, but to use the world so as not to abuse it, “ knowing that the fashion thereof passeth away.”

They admonish us of *the value of time*. It was an excellent prayer of Moses, “ so teach us to number our days, that we

may apply our hearts unto wisdom." A christian cannot be unmindful of this exercise; but even he is apt to err in his calculations,—to be too sanguine and confident in his expectations of years to come,—to live too much on the future,—to rely upon to-morrow as a matter of course; and in the same degree in which he does this, he becomes disposed to defer the work of to-day to some "more convenient season,"—to be remiss and negligent in improving present opportunities, and in securing a preparation for a dying hour. How useful in correcting this error is a frequent visitation of the afflicted. It is whilst contemplating the premature death of some, and the sudden and calamitous death of others,—the awfulness of affliction when disconnected from piety, and the difficulty of acquiring religion when disease and pain oppress the body and distract the mind; that he is made to feel the full impression of the inspired admonition, "boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." And again, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest."

They present us with affecting examples of *the sufficiency of divine grace*. A christian who is weak in faith usually shrinks from the prospect of trials. When afflictions of more than ordinary magnitude gather around his path, he is filled with anxious fears for his safety; his mind becomes distressed with gloomy forebodings. What more likely to strengthen the faith of such an one, and to prepare him for personal suffering, than to visit the abode of afflicted piety, and to contemplate the triumphs of divine grace? O, how often, when the fearful christian, in his rounds of mercy, has met with some pious individual exemplifying the spirit and the resources of christianity under bodily disease, and the losses, bereavements, and disappointments of life; when he has found him witness for God, standing in the evil day

“ Like a rock amidst the ocean’s wave,”

with sunshine on its brow, whilst the billows dash against its base ; when he has observed him full of peace in Christ, whilst full of tribulation in the world ; mourning more for his sins than for his afflictions ; more concerned to have his crosses sanctified than removed ; smiling even in tears ; holding fast, amidst the pressure of multiplied calamities, his confidence and hope ; when he has heard him exclaim, with an eye beaming with celestial joy,

“ Though waves and storms go o’er my head,
Though strength, and health, and friends, be gone,
Though joys be wither’d all and dead,
Though every comfort be withdrawn,
On this my stedfast soul relies,
Father, thy mercy never dies.”

At those times he has felt ashamed of his former fears, and with his heart inspired with a conviction of the faithfulness of God, and of the sufficiency of his grace for all the exigencies of his people, he has dismissed every fear, and has thanked God, and taken courage.

Finally, *would you be accepted and approved of God at the last and great day, then be merciful and compassionate to the utmost of your power.* If we have laid ourselves out for usefulness, and spared of our abundance, or even of our necessities, we have laid up for ourselves a good foundation for the time to come. “The Lord give mercy,” says Paul, “to the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain ; the Lord grant that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.” Yes, the merciful shall obtain mercy in that day when the value of it will be universally known and appreciated. Woe to those in that day, who, though they laid claim to a christian character, evinced an

unfeeling heart, and were deaf to the complaints of the poor and needy. They will then find themselves placed "on the left hand of the Judge;" and he shall say unto them, "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." Vengeance will glare on them from the throne of judgment, debarring all access to the mercy seat; and justice, inexorable justice, as it pronounces their fearful doom, "depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," will chase them from the limits of God's happy dominions, and pursue them to their own place, to the dwelling of misery and everlasting despair. That practical benevolence, however, which has been the result of evangelical piety, shall then be brought out to notice, and recounted. Yea, those whose love to God has been displayed in acts of sympathy, and kindness, and charity to men, shall be singled out by the Judge, and placed before the eye of the universe, as the objects of God's gracious and complacential regard. Then shall he recount their acts of devotedness to himself, shall publish their character, and proclaim his approbation, "inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." In this sentence all holy beings will acquiesce and rejoice. With what congratulations will they be accompanied in their ascent to heaven. How gratefully will they be referred to by those whose miseries, while here, they helped to remove; whose ignorance they instructed, whose faith they assisted, whose fears they removed, and whose salvation they promoted. Then shall they become as the angels of God, and rejoice in the unclouded and unrestricted manifestations of his love for ever and ever. Endeavour then to do good to the utmost of your power; to crowd into the narrow sphere of life all the useful services possible. Be active, be zealous, for the time is short.

Let your love appear unto all. By your words of kindness, your visits of mercy, your acts of benevolence, and self-denying liberality, let it be seen that you are the servants of the God of love, the followers of him who went about doing good. Be not weary of well-doing. Behold the blood-bought crown which glitters in the skies. Hear the voice which cries, "be thou faithful unto death, and thou shalt receive a crown of life."

YOUTH IN AFFLICTION.

Ye fair enchanting throng,
Ye golden dreams, farewell !
Earth has prevail'd too long,
And now I break the spell ;
Ye cherish'd joys of early years,
Jesus, forgive these parting tears.

But must I part with all?
My heart still fondly pleads ;
Yes,—Dagon's self must fall ;
It beats,—it throbs,—it bleeds :
Is there no balm in Gilead found,
To soothe and heal the smarting wound ?

O yes, there is a balm,
A kind physician there,
My fever'd mind to calm,
To bid me not despair ;
And now, dear Saviour, set me free,
And I will all resign to thee.

“ WILT THOU NOT FROM THIS TIME CRY UNTO ME, MY FATHER, THOU ART THE GUIDE OF MY YOUTH ? ”

JEREMIAH III., IV.

At every period of life, sickness is painful, and death is awful. In advanced age, however, nature teaches us to expect them, and presents us with a thousand premonitions of that affecting catastrophe, by which “ the earthly house of

this tabernacle shall be dissolved." In youth it is otherwise. This is the season of health and vigour, when the spirits are buoyant with hope, and the heart is elate with fond anticipations of the future. Whatever be the condition of the young, their spirits are usually lively and cheerful, and throw an attractive but delusive colouring over surrounding objects. Impelled by desire, they rush forward with inconsiderate ardour. Prompt to decide,—averse to hesitate, or to enquire,—and credulous, because untaught by experience how precarious are all earthly things, they rely upon them with a confidence which precludes all suspicion that they will ever give way; hence, when overtaken by sickness and infirmity, and a blight spreads itself over the field of their hope, withering the blossoms which had excited so many pleasing expectations, a disappointment is experienced, by which the young are often tempted to complain, and to regard their lot as one of peculiar hardship. The case is rendered still more alarming when sickness threatens to terminate in death; when the king of terrors suddenly presents himself before one who has spent the giddy hours of childhood and youth without reflection and the fear of God. Is it any wonder that he should find himself alarmed by conscience, agonized by disappointment, surrounded by difficulties, and overwhelmed by the prospect of eternal misery? Suffer me, my young friend, whose circumstances are in any respects similar to those I have just supposed,—suffer me to attempt to reconcile your mind to your circumstances, and to offer the counsels suited to your condition.

It is no less the interest than the duty of every one to endeavour to reconcile his mind to the appointments of a wise and gracious providence. The cup of affliction is, indeed, in all circumstances, unpalatable to human nature, nor is it to be denied that your circumstances are peculiarly afflictive. To be suddenly arrested by calamity in the very sun-shine of

your existence,—to be deprived of enjoyment,—to be subjected to severe pains,—and to be compelled to look forward to a premature death, may well excite perturbation of spirit; but take care that it does not break forth in murmuring and rebellion against God, or induce you to turn away from the means which can alone afford you relief. Let the following remarks be deliberately considered.

Your present circumstances are not singular. This consideration is frequently overlooked. We think of relatives and acquaintances who are strong and healthy, and whose youth is characterised by ease and enjoyment; but we do not reflect how many young people are afflicted as much, or perhaps more than we. Look round: how many may you discover whose circumstances are equally distressing with your own; and think how many more there are with whose cases you are totally unacquainted. In every condition, and in every period, man has been subject to these calamities. This is a weeping world. Sin has filled it with thorns and briers, with crosses and afflictions; and can you expect to travel through it without being torn and wounded, or exempt from disquietude and pain? Shall providence for your sake reverse its established order? Reflect, too, on the mortality of man. It is computed that nearly thirty millions die every year; what an awful reflection! how great is the multitude that is daily dropping into eternity. According to this computation, each minute is marked by the death of fifty-six human beings. How numerous, therefore, must be the paths that lead down to the grave. "All flesh is grass." The grass springeth up; it is beautiful and pleasant to the view; but however luxuriant, flourishing, and verdant for a while, the wind passeth over it, and it is gone. The worm destroys its root; it is scorched by the sun, or nipt by the frost; it falls before the mower's scythe, or yields to natural decay. How expressive of the vanity of man in his best estate! He cometh forth like a

flower, and is cut down. In ten thousand nameless ways may his term of life be abridged. Disease, and accident, and injury, beset his path. The fluid that circulates through his heart is impregnated with the seeds of death. He drops into the grave in every stage of his progress through his earthly pilgrimage. He knows not what a day, or an hour may bring forth. Your case then, presents nothing contrary to the ordinary experience of mankind. Perhaps the circumstance of your youth may to you furnish an exception to the general rule; but when death approaches he asks not "how old art thou?" He extends his power over the young as well as the aged. Millions of the young die yearly. What burial-ground can you visit without meeting with the most affecting memorials of the vanity of youth, and the uncertainty of life? There lie many who once trusted in youth, and looked on future years as their own. A little time back, and they were eager in the pursuit of imaginary happiness; the world was spread before them, decked with gay and fascinating colours; their hearts were big with life's futurities;—but they are gone;—they are mouldered back to dust;—their very coffins are decayed;—their gaiety is over;—their joys are past;—they have passed into the world of spirits. Prepared, or unprepared, they have met their God; and what is the world to them now? How solemn a consideration is this to all, and how necessary to be well weighed by the young. Guard then against the folly which primarily was only satirically applied to our species, yet is fairly imputable to general conduct—the folly of thinking all men mortal but ourselves.

Your present circumstances are not hard. Guard particularly against the thought that God deals severely with you. When our comforts are removed, our hopes disappointed, our spirits depressed, and our pains severe, nature is ever ready to prompt such a conclusion. You should remember the prejudices to which you are subject. You can see that in

your own circumstances which no other person can see, and which you cannot discover in the circumstances of others. Do you think it hard to be deprived of pleasures, and subjected to suffering in early life? Remember, that these pleasures, however much they may excite the desires and engage the attention of men, are not worth a thought. The pleasures of the world wear, it is true, a very alluring form to the eye of youth, but if you will believe the testimony of those who have enjoyed them, they are deceitful and vain. This testimony is borne, not only by those whose minds have been enlightened and purified by religion, but by those who still wish to find happiness in earthly things. They are more in expectation than in enjoyment. They have never satisfied any, and they could never have satisfied you. Even though we were to admit, that these pleasures are all that the gay heart of youth imagines, they cannot for one moment be compared to those which result from the favour and blessing of God; and these may all be your's. Religion is so truly the one important blessing, that it can supply the lack of every earthly enjoyment, while all earthly blessings united can never supply its want. Were the whole world your own, it could neither give real peace in life, nor support you on the bed of death, nor obtain for you a place in heaven. But all this you may find in religion. Seek after this. Let this become the subject of your supreme concern, of your earnest prayer, and of your diligent pursuit; and instead of being deprived of enjoyment, fountains of living water will open to your view, the streams of which will refresh, invigorate, and comfort you through every vicissitude of life, till you shall be introduced into the divine presence, where there are fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

But perhaps you are apprehensive of death, and you think it hard to die so soon. But why would you live here longer? He who has obtained a preparation for death has accomplished

the great purpose of living. Why would you live here any longer? The highest enjoyments of this world are not to be compared with the humblest glories of paradise. In that world to which an early death conducts the pious, there are pleasures which never cloy, treasures which fail not, and honours which never fade away. There no discontent murmurs, and no sorrows ever weep. There no disappointment is ever felt, and no fears arise. Listen to faith, opposing its conclusions to all the boasts of the carnal mind: I reckon that neither the pleasures nor sufferings of the present time, are worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed. Why would you live here any longer? Those who die in middle life are often harassed in their last hours by the most painful anxieties about the state of their worldly affairs, and the future condition of their dependent friends; but you have no partner whose heart will be torn with anguish by your death, nor children for whose sake you should wish to live. Why would you live here any longer? It may grieve you to part with your friends; but were you spared, from their more advanced life they would shortly have to leave you; yet a little while, and they will rest from their griefs by your side. Why would you live here any longer? Is it that you may glorify God? In heaven you shall serve him day and night in his temple, without one languid moment, or one vain thought, and in the midst of worshippers whose hearts are burning with fervour equal to your own. Or is it that you may advance the interests of religion? but your removal shews that providence has other instruments than you to employ in those labours of love. Still your early death, adorned by the graces of the Spirit, may have more influence in alluring others to goodness than your after exertions could have had; and if the wish and purpose of your heart to do good be sincere, God will accept of them as if carried into effect. But you are afraid of death. You are unfit to die. It is on this

account that your present circumstances distress you. Flee, then, O flee to the Saviour who is able to save to the uttermost. Repent, and turn to God with full purpose of heart. This dispensation is appointed to admonish you, and to urge you to prepare to meet your God. How much harder would have been your case if sudden death had removed you, in a moment, in all your sin and guilt, and shut you up in everlasting misery and despair.

Your present circumstances are what you had every reason to expect. I have no intention of charging you with any particular guilt; every man by sin has forfeited his comforts, his health, and his life. What you have enjoyed has been granted of mere favour, and surely from mere favour you could not infer a continuance of favour. If you are a child of God, you expect affliction as the effect of God's particular and paternal regard. You are chastened of the Lord that you may not be condemned of the world. Our heavenly Father loves his children too dearly to withhold any part of that discipline which is necessary to purge away their dross, or to prepare them for the enjoyment of celestial bliss. And why should any disciple of Jesus suppose that he shall escape affliction? Is the servant greater than his master, and shall any of us repine to follow in his steps? yet he was emphatically a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Affliction is the consecrated path that conducts to heaven. "It is through much tribulation that we are to enter the kingdom." If you are a child of wrath, as a creature must be that is living in the neglect of God, and in opposition to his will, is it to be expected that you should go on with impunity? Is it reasonable that a creature should be suffered to proceed unchecked, who is casting off his allegiance to God, abusing his favours, and dishonouring his name? Compare what you feel with what you deserve; what is, with what might have been. Think of the design which God has in view. Every afflictive

occurrence,—every pang of remorse,—every guilty fear, is the effect of that mercy, the ultimate design of which is to exchange the terrors of avenging justice into the mild and gentle accents of tender compassion and free forgiveness. Instead of repining, you have, therefore, abundant reason to praise God that he has dealt so bountifully with you.

Your present circumstances are capable of yielding the greatest possible advantages. How often have afflictions of body contributed to the salvation of the soul, and ought not that to be hailed as the greatest mercy which is the mean of averting so fearful a catastrophe as the destruction of the immortal spirit, or which is productive of so great a benefit as the possession of life eternal? Besides, in pursuing our spiritual career we are sometimes slow, and need to be quickened; we are sometimes obstinate, and pride must be humbled; we are sometimes fastidious, and our taste must be corrected; we are sometimes forgetful of what we have been taught, and our memories must be refreshed. How is all this to be effected, but by appropriate discipline, such as that which God is now employing? Your affliction, therefore, may be the mean of elevating your soul to a more intimate fellowship with God, and though for the present grievous, may become the happy cause of promoting that peace which passeth all understanding, that “joy which is unspeakable, and full of glory.” Besides, your affliction affords you the finest opportunity of glorifying God, by resignation to his will, by stedfast reliance on his faithfulness and truth, by grateful loving submission, by cheerful serenity and peace. How many young persons have suffered to the glory of God: out of their mouths God has perfected praise. The christian is never so well circumstanced to honour God, or to render religion impressive, as “in the fires;” but, if that christian sufferer be a youthful one, his example possesses ten-fold force. The rareness of the spectacle renders it the more striking. O, to see a young

person, when in affliction, exhibiting the graces of patience and resignation, smiling even in tears, cherishing a grateful spirit, and enjoying consolations which neither pain can destroy nor death fright away, is a convincing proof of what the grace of God can effect in the human character. Many such instances we have on record; strive to add one more to the number. Then shall the ignorant come and be instructed, the careless shall come and be impressed, the righteous shall come and be quickened, your mourning friends shall come and wipe away the falling tear, angels shall come and rejoice, Jesus shall come and take you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also.

These considerations, and others that may occur, will, I hope, avail to reconcile you to your affliction. Aim at a cordial approbation of the divine conduct. Be deeply concerned that you may have one will with God. This is all for which you ought to be concerned. It is not necessary, either to your safety or happiness, that you should live. It is necessary to both that you should have one will with God. Let the following lines be engraven upon your heart; let them engage your thoughts incessantly, till you can breathe them out before the throne of grace as the expression of sincere and fervent desire :—

“ Silent I own Jehovah’s name,
I kiss the scourging hand,
And yield my comforts and my life
To thy supreme command.”

To promote this state of mind, consider *the importance of personal religion*. Make it the subject of serious and deliberate thought. Its value surpasses all calculation, and can be estimated only by the value of the soul, the duration of eternity, the happiness of heaven, and the misery of hell. Salvation is the great end of life. Get what you will, if you get

not this, you have lost the purpose of your existence. Were you to realise all the honour, and wealth, and pleasure, which your heart could desire, or that the world could give, still if you lost the salvation of your soul, you would have lived in vain. Life would be a lost adventure, if you did not gain religion. On the other hand, however afflicted in your body, or depressed in your circumstances, however disappointed in your hopes, or cut short in the term of your existence, if you obtain eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus, your condition is infinitely to be preferred to that of him who lives and dies without religion, though he were to be as rich as Croesus, as powerful as Alexander, or as long-lived as Methusaleh. We attach great importance to our possessions and comforts upon earth, nor are they destitute of interest and value; but, ah! how diminutive are all earthly things, when contrasted with those which are eternal. A little longer, and the world will be to you as though it had never been; unless, indeed, the anguish of a guilty conscience should perpetuate the remembrance of mercies abused, and of sins unrepented. Nothing will then be deemed interesting or important, but the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Think what it is to dwell with God, to be made like him, to see him as he is, to be delivered from every source of uneasiness, enriched with every blessing, raised to the highest degree of glory and felicity of which our nature is capable, and to be assured that we shall be for ever with the Lord. Eternal bliss! eternal bliss! in comparison of this, what are all the objects after which ambition rages in public, or envy pines in secret? they have not even the place of an atom, or the weight of a feather, or the value of a straw. If the neglect of religion only deprived you of this happiness, how tremendous would be the evil! but contemplate the misery of hell. Are you shocked at the very name? Ah, then, ask yourself what must be the dreadful state itself. O, that you may never

realize it ! But you stand on the verge of the eternal world, and if destitute of genuine piety, you are on the very brink of the infernal pit. View it with fearful apprehension. Here are all the nations "that forget God;" here are all they that could not use the world without abusing it; here are they who were careful for many things, but neglected the one thing needful; here are the young, whose hearts cheered them in the days of their youth, who walked in the way of their own heart, and in the sight of their own eyes, and forgot that for all these things God would bring them into judgment; here is the foolish man, who said to his soul, "soul, take thine ease, for thou hast much store of goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry;" here is the miserable Dives, who in this world was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, but is now calling for a drop of water to cool his parched tongue; and here, too, is the young man, so promising, so wise, so humble, as to inquire after eternal life, kneeling, and so amiable as to engage the affection of the Saviour, but who went away sorrowful because he would not resign an earthly possession at the command of him, who would more than have repaid the sacrifice. Alas for them! they have now learnt the madness of neglecting their immortal souls. They indulged their pleasure, they pursued their business, as if they were to live here for ever, but the dream is vanished; their eyes are opened; wrath is come upon them to the uttermost; and the fire of hell torments both body and soul. Do you know and believe these things? then be diligent that you may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless. Let the sentiment be deeply impressed on your mind,

" Nothing is worth a thought beneath,
But how I may escape the death
That never—never dies ;

How make mine own election sure,
And, when I fail on earth, secure
A mansion in the skies."

Consider the facilities which your present circumstances afford for the attainment of religion. How loud and solemn is the call by which God is now addressing you. Now he entreats you to give him all your heart, and to seek all your happiness in him. Now he is convincing you that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field;" that "life is a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away;" that youth is no security from the stroke of death, and therefore nothing can be more unwise than to depend, in a business so momentous, on events so precarious. Now God is making your "heart soft," and opening your ear to instruction. Now he is giving you to feel the poverty of earthly pleasures and resources, and the importance of possessing a better portion than earth can furnish. Now he is giving you space for repentance, and is entreating you to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near." Now you enjoy a season of merciful visitation. This may be the most solemn and important period of your life,—the most favourable for your conversion, and if you suffer it to pass away without improvement, there is reason to fear that no future affliction will prove so deeply impressive, or that so favourable an opportunity will occur again. Should you recover, what facilities can you anticipate in the future more favourable than those which you now possess? Do you imagine that your heart will become softer, your disposition more pliable, or your mind more susceptible of religious impressions? as well might you expect that plants should gather freshness from the withering drought. Evil dispositions grow with time, and are confirmed by exercise. Sin persisted in natu-

turally tends to darken the understanding, to stupify the conscience, and to harden the heart. If a man wishes to eradicate, is his task likely to become easier by suffering the shrub to grow year after year till it becomes a tree, and is so deeply rooted as to defy even a storm? Besides, you are now free from those cares which will perplex, from those schemes which will engross, from those engagements which will hinder you in more advanced life. When can you hope that your worldly difficulties will be fewer than at present? Neglect the present opportunity, and the probability is that you will become entangled either with the cares or the pollutions of the world; that religious impressions will be erased; that your mind will either be dissipated by pleasure, or irritated by disappointment; in short, that you will increase, an hundred fold, the difficulties of salvation. Above all, remember that God is now peculiarly disposed to assist you; your present afflictions are cords of love by which he would draw you to himself, and will you cut them off? They are so many ways by which he addresses you, and will you refuse him that speaketh from heaven? O, cherish these indications of his mercy. Yield yourself now to the mandates of his will, to the impulse of his Spirit, and to the attractions of his love, saying, "I am thine, save me." "To day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart." "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, my father, thou art the guide of my youth?"

Consider the pleasantness of early piety. It is the common delusion of the world that religion is a melancholy thing, unsuitable for the young, and destructive of their pleasure. The word of God, on the contrary, describes true religion to be the only source of real comfort. That holy book declares that the "ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace," and all the saints in the universe will confirm the truth of the assertion. Go to them, collect their testimony. Go not to the christian of doubtful charac-

ter, for he has only just religion sufficient to make him miserable ; but go to the holy, the devout, and they will tell you that they never knew what pleasure was until they gave their hearts to God.

In support of their testimony, consider *the miseries which it prevents*. It does not, it is true, deliver from poverty, sickness, or reproach ; it furnishes no defence against the sorrows that are common to man : there are, however, other evils more malignant in their character, and much more destructive to human peace ; these arise from the disposition of the heart, and from these it is that it saves us. It has been remarked, "the mind is its own place, and can make a heaven of hell, and a hell of heaven." Men carry the springs of happiness or misery in their own bosom. Hence it is said, "the wicked are like a troubled sea, which cannot rest," which is never at peace, "but continually casting up mire and dirt." So long as conscience only reproaches and stings, —so long as the affections are inordinate, base, and insincere, selfish, guilty, and rebellious,—so long as sin is indulged, holiness hated, and God dishonoured, it is impossible that peace and consolation should find a residence within. Self condemned, self despised, self abhorred, your mind must flit from all communion with itself, and must try to find its poor and transient pleasure in forgetfulness of what it is, in the hurry and anxiety of worldly business, or in the pursuit of base and unhallowed joys. Sickly, pained, and languishing, your mind may thus go on looking for health and ease from medicines that will only irritate the disease, and increase the pain ;—but in religion alone will you find the true remedy. It frees us from the tyranny of evil passions, from horror of conscience, from the burden of guilt, and from the terrors of Jehovah's wrath. Thus by removing our greatest misery, and the causes which produce it, it contributes to our happiness.

Dwell upon *the privileges it confers*. The moment you attempt to obtain the pardoning love of God, your feet are turned towards the ways of peace; and when you have obtained that pearl of great price, you will, along with it, receive

“What nothing earthly gives, or can destroy,
The soul’s calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy.”

You will then enter into rest. Your conscience will speak only peace, and will smile with approbation on all the pious dictates of your heart. You will be restored to the favour of God, and in him you will find all that can make you happy in this evil world. God will become the object of your supreme regard, and all your powers will sweetly repose in him. You will rejoice in an abiding sense of his presence, and will deem it your meat and drink to suffer all his will. Feeling that you owe your all to him, that the debt of gratitude already contracted is immense, and that the best returns you can make to him are poor and unworthy, you will be still saying, “what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?” The image of your Maker will then be stamped upon your mind, and begin to shine there with moral and eternal beauty. To your eye all within will be lovely and pleasant. No tumult will ruffle, no storms will agitate; peace will hush and soothe every disordered affection, and will banish every uneasy purpose, and serenity, like the summer’s evening, will spread a soft and pleasing lustre over the soul. Possessed of a new and real dignity, and assuming the character of a rational being, you will, for the first time, begin to enjoy yourself, and you will find this enjoyment to be not only new and entirely different from any thing you have ever felt, but noble and expansive. Thus will your days glide sweetly away, and secure of the favour of God, while in humility devoting yourself to his service, you will “rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks.”

Consider the *consolations it imparts*. This world has been represented as a vale of tears; all who travel through it must expect to be assailed by affliction in some form or other; but no affliction can befall the true christian, under which religion will not yield him suitable comfort and consolation. Say, my young friend, if you are a follower of the world, what is there in all your vain delights that can support and comfort the mind in trouble? where, now in your distress, is your relief and joy? Nothing but religion can qualify you for suffering. The enmity of the world will assail you in various forms, but in the favour of God you will find a compensation for all its injuries. You may be disappointed in the tenderest attachments of life, but in Christ you will have a friend that loveth at all times, a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. You may see your dearest companions wasting in pining sickness, and your spirits may sink under the sad foreboding of a separation from them, in the very season, too, when every kind affection is most powerfully excited; but you will know that death cannot separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord. Your father and mother will forsake you; this first and silver cord of life that binds you together must be broken, and in vain will you address them in the language of endearment, or touch them with the hand of love, for neither voice nor smile, will acknowledge your kindness, and no grasp will respond to your's; but then you will know that Christ lives in you, and enjoy the support of that sweet assurance, "this God is my God, for ever and ever; and he will guide me even unto death." You may be called to endure wasting sickness and excruciating pain, but even then, as your pains abound, your consolations shall abound also.

Reflect upon *the happy conclusion of a religious life*. O, my young friend, let me tell you, and tell you seriously, you

must die. If life be protracted a few years longer, still you must die. Perhaps you look on death as dreadful. To youth, especially, there is something peculiarly repulsive in the idea of death; for shocking is the contrast between beauty and ghastliness, soundness and corruption, gay hopes and the last farewell; but faith in Christ can conquer all such uneasy feelings, and dissipate them so completely, as to call forth the song of triumph, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" You must die; yet, if possessed of an interest in Christ, you may die in peace; and when the hour arrives which to many proves the occasion of disquietude and anguish, and indescribable distress, you may hail its approach, with "come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Then, when languishing in your last sickness, you may wish for nothing less, and fear nothing more, than recovery and longer life. O, when this scene of vanity is ending, and the world, with all its possessions and attractions, is fading away from your view; when all that has here been the occasion either of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, shall cease to interest, or to awaken one feeling in the heart; then you shall experience the invigorating influence of faith and hope, and as you advance towards the border of an awful eternity, and look back upon what you are leaving, and forward to what awaits you, you shall be enabled to say, "the world is now leaving me, but I regret not its loss; I have long renounced it as vanity; more substantial bliss I have in prospect; afflicted I am, but my affliction is light and momentary;—less, far less than I have deserved. It is the will of my heavenly Father, and I submit. He makes my bed in my sickness, and puts underneath and round about me his everlasting arms. I see death approaching, but I am not afraid to die. My sins, of which I have repented, the blood of Christ hath washed away, and being reconciled by his death, how much more shall I be saved by his life. O, how precious is Christ to my soul! Farewell, ye

scenes of imperfection, ye scenes of sin and folly, I go where joy for ever reigns, where there is light and no darkness, joy and no sorrow, holiness and no alloy. I go from mortal to immortal things, from dying men to the living God.

“ My cares and my labours, my sickness and pain,
And sorrow, are near to an end ;
The summit of bliss I shall speedily gain,
The height of perfection ascend.”

At length your last conflicts end,—your tongue is silent,—your eyes are closed,—the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken. Surrounding friends look not on you, but on your lifeless clay. The soul is escaped to other scenes, to an unchanging and eternal world. Dark and dismal as the hour appears to the eye of sense, if you are found in Jesus, it will not be so to you ; but when your last painful struggle is over, O, what a mighty change shall you experience ! Admitted into heaven as your final home, what new prospects will present themselves ; what new treasures will be unfolded ; what ecstatic joys shall be formed in your heart. You will then be favoured with the immediate presence of God ; you will gaze upon the unclouded glory of Him whom you have loved, though not seen ; you will be blessed with the society of angels, and of just men made perfect ; you will be crowned with unfading glory ; you will have an overflowing fulness of divine enjoyment ; you will then be a king and a priest unto God, will abide in his immediate presence where is fulness of joy, and at his right hand where there are pleasures for evermore. O, if all the other advantages of early piety were to be expunged, surely here is more than sufficient to induce you to make religion your choice. If not before, now then be decided ; to God, your creator, preserver, and redeemer, now surrender up your heart. Rest not until your peace is made with him. Then saved by grace, you

will be happy ; the remnant of your days, whether they be many or few, will be strewed with sweet peace, and heavenly hope, and bursting joy ; and death rendered stingless, will be welcomed by you as a friend, and as a necessary passage to the regions of blessedness. Beyond the grave, while the sinner amidst eternal torments, the fire that never is quenched, and the worm that never dies, is experiencing the bitter fruits of a life of sin and folly, you will begin to reap the fruits of a life devoted to the service and glory of God. Admitted home to your Father's house, and placed in that mansion which your loving Redeemer hath provided for you, you will live only to become increasingly wise and happy ; and a strong feature in your employment will be to sing, " unto him that hath loved me, and washed me from my sins in his own blood, and hath made me a king and a priest unto God, unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Be wise then for eternity. Devote your youth to God, and he will remember you for ever. He will be your God here, and your portion for ever and ever.

OLD AGE IN AFFLICTION.

God of my childhood and my youth,
The guide of all my days ;
I have declared thy heav'nly truth,
And told thy wond'rous ways.

Wilt thou forsake my hoary hairs,
And leave my fainting heart ?
Who shall sustain my sinking years,
If God, my strength, depart ?

Let me thy power and truth proclaim
To the surviving age ;
And leave a savour of thy name
When I shall quit the stage.

" AND EVEN TO YOUR OLD AGE I AM HE ; AND EVEN TO
HOAR HAIRS WILL I CARRY YOU."

ISAIAH XLVI., IV.

OLD age is what most wish to attain, and of which, those who reach it are generally disposed to complain. There is a great variety in the circumstances and feelings which usually accompany this period of life, but, with all who attain it, it is the time when their " strength fadeth ;" and with numbers it is an evil time, a time of gloom and sadness, of labour and sorrow. Caleb could affirm, " now lo ! I am fourscore and five years old ; as yet I am as strong this day as I was

in the day that Moses sent me to spy out the land : as my strength was then, even so is my strength now for war, both to go out and come in." But how few can adopt this language. To the generality of the aged the language of Barzillai is much more appropriate, "I am this day fourscore years old, and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or singing women?" Yes, to the greatest portion of those who attain old age, it is a period which brings along with it a thousand premonitions of that affecting catastrophe by which the "earthly house of this tabernacle" shall be dissolved.

The *physical deterioration* attendant on old age is peculiarly afflictive. Of this Solomon has given us a highly figurative, but truly impressive description. He speaks of it as a time "when the sun, and moon, and stars are darkened;" when the understanding, the imagination, the memory, those superior powers which rule in the body of man, like the heavenly luminaries in the natural world, become obscured, and fade away, as when darkening clouds interpose between us and the lights of the firmament. In the latter instance, however, the obscuration is but temporary, whereas in the former it is final. In every period of life afflictions and vexations occur, yet the storm is usually succeeded by sunshine and calm, and these serve to obliterate the impression from our minds; but now the "clouds return after the rain." Old age is a period of continual sorrow, precluding the prospect of renewed health, or of better days. "The keepers of the house," the arms and hands, which are made to defend the body, "tremble;" and the "strong men," the shoulders, where the strength of the body is placed, and which were once able to bear every weight, begin to stoop and "bow themselves." "The grinders cease;" the teeth decay, and are mostly lost; the few that remain become incapable of mastication, and thus

cease to do their work, "because they are few." "Also those that look out at the windows," the optic nerves, which receive impressions through the medium of the different humours of the eye, "are darkened;" the humours becoming thick, flat, and turbid, are no longer capable of transmitting objects in that clear and distinct manner as formerly, so that the aged are as one that looketh out of a window in a dark night. "Then the doors are shut in the streets;" difficulties and obstructions attend all the passages of the body; and because "the sound of the grinding is low," because the teeth are either lost or rendered unserviceable, indigestion is induced with all its train of attending evils. The young and healthy sleep soundly, but the aged sleep with difficulty, and "rise up at the voice of the bird;" they slumber rather than sleep, and the chirping of a sparrow is sufficient to awake them. "The daughters of music are brought low;" the voice, that wonderful instrument, almost endless in the strength and variety of its tones, becomes feeble and tremulous; the spirits too, being less active than once they were, and the hearing dull, they are less affected by the powers of harmony, and merriment and pleasure are no more. Old age being inactive and helpless becomes "afraid of that which is high;" the steep and slippery path is viewed with apprehension because of feebleness, and when they walk out "fears" are "in the way," lest they should meet with some danger which they have neither strength to repel, nor agility to escape. The vigour of manhood has been superseded by feebleness, decrepitude, and imbecility; and these excite apprehension and terror at the appearance of difficulty or danger. Then "the almond tree" falls off. The hair begins to change, first grey, then white, and, like the almond tree, withers and falls away. Even the "grasshopper" becomes "a burden." The legs, once light and nimble to leap as the legs of that insect, and which used with ease to bear the burden of the

whole body, now become feeble and unable to sustain their own weight. And when the faculties thus fail, even "the desire fails." Persons thus advanced in age no longer delight in those things which formerly yielded enjoyment, and which are highly grateful and entertaining to others. The busy scenes of life are viewed as troublesome and oppressive,—the pursuits of gaiety and pleasure cease to interest,—the powers of enjoyment are paralyzed,—even conversation becomes wearisome. Such are the physical evils which come upon the aged, and prepare the way for the last and greatest evil, when "man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

Rarely is the decay of the human faculties a solitary affliction; in its train there are many other calamities, which greatly increase the feelings of desertion and desolation with which it is often connected. It is usually embittered by the recollection of many *distressing bereavements*. How bitter to the aged is the recollection that most of the friends and companions of their youth have been removed by the hand of death. One and another has been called away, until they are left almost solitary and alone in the midst of a new world; and of the multitudes with whom they have mingled in the journey of life, scarcely any remain to console them in their declining years, or to accompany them in the last stage of their journey. Their partners in the gay sports of childhood, and in the active pursuits of business, have gone to their long home. When their engaging appearance and amiable manners arise to their recollection, their heart is saddened by the thought that their beauty is consumed in the grave, and that to the world their accomplishments are lost for ever. Few are left to whom they can talk of the mercies or of the trials of former years. A new race has gradually risen up around them, by whom they are regarded with little interest, and with whom they have but little sympathy. The same sun

which shone upon them in the days of their youth still sheds its rays around them, but how different is its influence on their languid feelings and on their freezing blood. The same spring returns which in their early days renovated the face of nature, but how different does its influence appear to their dim eye, and amidst the sad impressions of their own decay. On many a scene once esteemed lovely and interesting they are disposed to write, "the glory is departed," for none appears decked with the charms which youthful fancy beheld in it.

How *utterly forsaken and destitute* are some of the aged: the loss of children to some, and the undutifulness of children to others, are calamities of the severest nature. Bitter is the pang which wrings the heart, when, instead of realizing the fond anticipations of earlier days, and receiving from a numerous family those kind, prompt, and affectionate attentions which mitigate the pains and soothe the sorrows of declining years, the aged see their children successively torn away by the relentless hand of death, until that hand has written them childless, nor left so much as one to minister to their wants, to smooth their dying pillow, or to close their eyes when they shall have finished their course. Or, what is still more painful to endure, when the aged see their children become perverse, ungrateful, and rebellious, and in the eager pursuit of low and degrading pleasures, or from a base and inhuman selfishness leave them to solitude, neglect, and suffering.

Poverty is a frequent accompaniment of old age. Heavy is the affliction when the decay of natural strength is associated with a diminution or an actual withdrawal of the necessary supplies of life; when the want of food and raiment is connected with the conviction, the painful conviction, that there is no power to labour for them as in days that are past. And how soon does neglect fall to the lot of him who hath waxed poor. Harrowing must be the conviction to a right-

hearted man, that he is felt and complained of as a burden, and that the supply he is compelled by necessity to receive is given to him with reluctance. Seldom in such case do the soft tones of affection reach his ear ; far more frequently is it assailed by the language of cold insensibility, or of stern reproach. Sad, indeed, is the condition of him who has to endure in his latter days the pressure of pain and multiplying infirmities, and, with the recollection of better days pressing upon his mind, has to struggle with poverty, neglect, and ingratitude. Such a termination of the journey of life, when viewed apart from religion, is cheerless and melancholy. Religion, which is the best companion of youth, is the only effectual support of the aged. It is that alone which can solve the difficulties that perplex the mind, when human life is viewed apart from a future state, and from the light which scripture supplies ; and it is that alone which can remove the gloom and despondency so generally experienced when the aged are left to struggle with infirmity and desolation. How many by the hopes and influences of the ever blessed gospel have been rendered, not only patient and resigned, but even joyful. Their "hoary head" has been a crown of glory, being found in the way of righteousness. Amidst the pressure of circumstances peculiarly discouraging they have exhibited a settled tranquillity of mind, a firm and unshaken confidence in God ; a cheerful submission to the circumstances of their condition, not less beneficial to themselves than instructive to others. Suffer me, then, to place before the aged reader the duties and consolations which peculiarly belong to this advanced period of life. The foundation of all must be laid in those great principles of religion, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Until then, you cannot possess a christian character, nor can you experience the supports and consolations connected with it. To all men, of every age, no enquiry can be so interesting and important as

that which relates to the grounds of their faith and hope in God, and of their expectation of future happiness. Many cherish a persuasion of their spiritual safety whose hope is a fearful delusion,—a dangerous presumption,—and has no sanction whatsoever in the word of God. To the aged, however, ready as they are, in the ordinary course of nature, to sink into the grave, it is of the greatest consequence that they should, without a moment's delay, solemnly and faithfully ask their own heart, whether they have repented of their sins, and believed in Christ with their hearts unto righteousness. Can you, my aged friend, look back upon the long period which divine forbearance has permitted you to live, and not perceive that you have been guilty of innumerable omissions and neglects of duty; of innumerable acts of positive transgression, in thought, word, and deed, against the divine majesty; and that your sins have been attended by many aggravating circumstances? Have you not impressed upon your mind the recollection of mercies abused, opportunities lost, talents misapplied, ordinances neglected, and warnings slighted; and do not these call for deep humiliation and heartfelt sorrow? True humility and contrition of spirit will lead you with much earnestness to implore the divine forgiveness, and to rest your hope of obtaining it exclusively upon the atonement and mediation of the Redeemer. Remember that if you are a stranger to Christ, your saving acquaintance with him must be now or never. Every step brings you nearer not only to the grave but to the eternal gulf. Your present position is one unspeakably fearful, and its aspect can only be changed by an immediate, hearty, and unreserved application to the blood of sprinkling.

Mercy yet waits to be gracious; and it must be criminal and foolish in the highest degree, to delay for one moment the acceptance of its offers. You may be afraid to attempt this from fear and despair; but you thus question the sincerity

and power of a gracious Saviour, and give to the devil success in his last attempt to ruin you. The prayer of contrition never rose to him in vain: "Why will ye die?" is the language which he pours into the sinner's ear, as he totters on the brink of eternal woe. Flee, then, to your strong hold; escape for your life; a little while longer and neither penitence, nor faith, will avail; seize, then, this opportunity of escape from wrath to come. Is the reader, however, one who has already received remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified? Can you say, I do indeed feel that I am a sinner, but I have mourned over my transgressions before God, they have led me to cry earnestly to him for mercy, to cast myself upon the atonement of the Redeemer as my only hope, and by faith in him I have found peace for a troubled conscience, and can now rejoice in hope of the glory of God? Then let your mind be directed to those duties which arise from the peculiarity of your present circumstances.

Daily familiarize yourself to the thought of your approaching end. You cannot expect long to be the pilgrim of earth. How important that ere you are called hence you should familiarize to your mind the thought of your departure. You are about to take a journey into a far country, and it is well, surely, that your mind should often recur to your great and solemn undertaking. It is worse than folly, it is madness, for an aged man to turn away from the thoughts of his latter end. The young *may* die soon, the aged *must*. Yet it is wonderful with what eagerness many of the old cling to the idea of years yet to come, and how gratified they are with every compliment from others which strengthens that idea. Little as life has to recommend it at such a period, they cleave to it with eager and pertinacious grasp. When compelled to admit that they have not long to live, it is with evident reluctance, nor has the prospect the least influence on their temper

and conduct. They see the winter's storm gathering, but prepare no shelter. Such conduct is in every view indecent, irreligious, and contemptible. It presents one of the most striking examples of the weakness and depravity of man. What can present a greater outrage to common sense? what can create amazement, if not the follies that dishonour youth in those that are miraculously alive after the stated period of human life? This outdares the felon repeating his crime not only under the gallows, but with the cord around his neck. To the christian, however, the idea of death is familiar, and it has in it nothing unpleasant; he cherishes it as an important element in the improvement of his character. To those who are in Christ Jesus an exchange of worlds is an unspeakable blessing. Death, in itself is a gloomy and depressing subject, viewed in connexion with the cross and passion of the Redeemer, and with a vital union with him, loses its natural terrors and assumes an aspect even of invitation and triumph. Endeavour, then, to rise to the spirit of that unseen world into which you must so soon enter. Realize by faith the animating and consoling discoveries of scripture. Meditate on the promises. Survey the fair land which lies beyond the floods of Jordan. Give yourself to meditation and prayer, and let the love of heavenly things, and the prospect of their speedy enjoyment, raise your mind above the trials you endure. Let every coming day find you more engaged in these exercises. How refreshing are the prospects of the aged christian! In the near view of eternal life he may well forget all that would invest declining years with melancholy and gloom. He has reached the last stage of a journey which tends to his father's house. He has passed the wilderness, and stands on Jordan's bank, ready to enter the promised land when the waters of the cold stream shall have divided. Through the crevices which time and affliction have made in his earthly tabernacle, the soul looks out upon its eternal mansions; and how re-

freshing should be the sight of home. This life, at best, is but the night of existence ; we only begin to live when we die. O, aged pilgrim, rejoice with joy unspeakable. With you the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Your all-faithful Redeemer will keep that which you have committed to him ; he will not forsake you when your strength faileth. Instead of shrinking from the approach of death, rather cry, Lord, help me to spring forward to meet it as the joyful porch to immortal bliss. So to do is to die daily. Complete blessedness will meet you, for "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." They enter into rest. To them "to die is gain." O, realize their blessedness, every morning, every day, and then dying will not seem to you as if some strange thing happened to you.

Endeavour in the midst of your trials to cultivate a *thankful disposition*. In the retrospect of his past life how much of the goodness of God may the aged christian discover, to call forth grateful acknowledgment. On the record of memory there are inscribed a thousand memorials of the loving-kindness and faithfulness of his God and Father. In scenes of darkness and of light he perceives the indications of one and the same paternal government. He wonders not that he has been afflicted so much as that he should, amidst so many provocations, have been treated with so much lenity and forbearance. Oh, what a delightful theme of meditation in old age is the providence of God, beheld, as it is by the christian, in its relation to the economy of redemption !

Consider, aged reader, from how many dangers divine providence has delivered you. How often, by God's mercy, you have been recovered from sickness, and rescued from calamities to which many of your friends have fallen victims, and which might have cut short your connexion with time, and ushered you, with all the guilt of impenitence, into the presence of an offended and avenging God. Reflect on the

numberless instances in which you have experienced the goodness of God, when you might justly have been suffered to perish in your iniquities. Call to mind all the means employed by the Almighty for effecting your conversion to himself; how he followed you in your wanderings,—strove with your impenitence,—gave you warning after warning,—arousing you from your lethargy,—checking you in your pursuits of sin and folly,—hedging up your way with thorns, until at length, pierced with a sense of sin and danger, you became “wearied in the greatness of your way,” and cried, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Consider, too, how often by God’s grace you have been preserved from temptations to sin, to which you might have yielded, and your souls delivered from the wiles of the great enemy, “like as a bird from the snares of the fowler;” how repeatedly the power of his grace has been felt in the subjugation of besetting sins,—in victory over the world,—in the gradual diminution of unbelieving fears,—in the feeling of increased communion with God,—in limiting the influence of temptation,—and in strengthening the principle of holy resignation to the divine will. In affliction, too, this grace has been as an angel of mercy speaking peace to your sorrowful spirit, and teaching you to look up to him who afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men, but does it only when there is a needs be, and invariably for our profit. Even amidst the weariness, and infirmity, and sorrow, that now press upon you, there are not wanting causes for thankfulness. If many of the springs of your former enjoyment are dried up, has not God opened new streams of life and happiness to your view? May you not, in the contemplation, say, I am, it is true, helpless and tottering, and my natural strength decayed, but “God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” My eye is dim, but by faith I can penetrate within the vail, and behold the land that is afar off. Many are the infirmities which re-

mind me that the tabernacle of clay is about to be dissolved, but everlasting arms are about my sinking frame, and the God of Jacob is the refuge and hiding place of my soul. He it is who in my sleepless hours gives me "songs in the night," and teaches my fainting spirit to rely on the faithful promises of his unchanging love. "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me," and "my bread shall be given me, and my water shall be sure." My friends are nearly all gone, removed by the hand of death, "but the Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Why should I complain that it is not with me as in former days? Am I not going the way of all flesh, and must not age and infirmity seek their resting place in the grave? Death will terminate my sorrows, and reward my toils; will bring the crown of glory, and put me in possession of all those blessings to which in desire and expectation I have been so long looking forward. The thankfulness thus excited by the review of your mercies, will naturally dispose you to avoid those infirmities of temper to which old age is exposed. It will especially check that fretfulness and irritability into which the aged are sometimes betrayed; instead of having your mind overspread with gloom and despondency, it will be pervaded by serenity and peace; instead of the language of complaint, you will adopt the acknowledgment of Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

Guard against the temptations incident to your condition.

Increasing infirmities both of body and mind, attended, it may be, not only with loss of many sources of enjoyment, but also with positive weariness and pain, have a natural tendency to irritate and sour the temper. Sometimes this irritation will display itself in expressions of impatience, and in peevishness of behaviour; sometimes in a propensity to obtrude on others minute and complaining details of pains and trials; sometimes

in the indulgence of unreasonable expectations of sympathy and assistance, and then in discontent and murmurs when these expectations are disappointed ; the harshest reflections are indulged, and the wish is repeated, that they were taken away from a scene where there is none to pity them. But where the mind and heart are governed by the principles and feelings of religion, such fretfulness and impatience will have no place, or, at least, will be guarded against and resisted. Pain and infirmity will be meekly borne, as being designed by a merciful Creator, in the ordinary course of his providence, to exercise the graces of patience and resignation, and gradually to wean the heart from a world which it is so soon to leave. There is enough in the present supports and in the eternal hopes of christianity, to check the feelings of despondency, and to inspire resignation and contentment. With the bible in his hand, and its precious truths in his heart, the aged pilgrim may rise above all the discouragements of his condition, and may shew to all around him that he can joy in the Lord, even when the springs of creaturely enjoyment are one after another dried up. How much does a peaceful and serene old age adorn the christian profession, especially in the season of infirmity and affliction. Let the aged reader, therefore, treasure up such thoughts and reflections as tend to gladden, to expand, to purify the heart. To complain of the infirmities of old age, is as absurd as to complain of the falling leaves of autumn, or of the short and feeble light of the winter's sun, when the year is drawing to a close. Though many comforts are withdrawn, think how many yet remain ; though many infirmities press, yet they are appointed of God that he may manifest his compassion and mercy in solacing and supporting the sufferer. The heart fails that he may strengthen it. The steps totter, that he may uphold them. Nature droops, that he may revive it ; and sad and gloomy forebodings arise, that he may give everlasting consolation and good hope through

grace. You have only been called to tread that path which thousands have trodden before you, and nothing has yet befallen you but what is common to men. Strive then to be an example of patience, and meekness, and resignation to the will of God. By nothing can you more effectually recommend religion to others. This will speak a language which none can mistake ; it will commend itself to the most perverse and thoughtless. Your cheerful patience under infirmities will prove the strength of your consolation ; and your tranquillity in the view of death will be an evidence of the power of the hope of immortality. Thus the fortitude and acquiescence which they will admire will be your joy and crown. And how peaceful is death to a man thus familiarized to it. It is sweet, like the evening of a long summer day, when a solemn stillness is gathering over the world, when the clouds are gilded by the departing sun, and the air is cooled by the falling dew.

Earnestly seek after an increasing meekness for future and eternal glory. An apostle assigns it as a reason for diligence, that our salvation is nearer than when we believed. Holiness is capable of improvement to the last stage of our lives. It was when the apostle Paul was approaching the termination of his course, when he had the end of his journey in view, when he had outstripped most of his competitors in the christian course, that he exclaimed, "not as though I were already perfect, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The symptoms of decay, therefore, which so rapidly increase upon you, instead of being regarded as reasons for repose and self-indulgence, ought to be considered as so many calls to redeem the time. Your eye is now dim, but it will soon be completely closed. Your voice is now feeble, but it will soon be completely silent. Your ability to avail yourself

of the means of grace, and the opportunities of usefulness, is rapidly declining ; soon it will altogether cease. Receiving, therefore, daily admonitions of your approaching end, ought they not to excite in you increasing earnestness and diligence to improve the short time of existence which yet remains ? Ought not the prospect before you to produce the same result ? You are soon to associate with those who serve God day and night in his temple, and will you now slumber ? You are soon to sing the song of the Lamb, and will you now hang your harp upon the willows ? You are soon to see God as he is, and will you now stop short in your pursuit of holiness ? The bridegroom is at hand, and will you now give yourselves up to slumber ? Loud is the call that is addressed to you to prepare to meet your God, and will you now yield to the flesh which is ever crying, "be still ?" Glory at hand requires the full and lively exercise of grace ; and heaven opening before you demands the utmost ardour of love and praise. Have you yet carried holiness to the utmost height ? Have you yet reached the full extent of christian privilege ? Have you yet realized the salvation of the gospel in all its fulness ? Will your faith, and hope, and love, and spirituality, admit of no farther increase ? Do you not see many defects that need to be remedied ? many blessings that are yet unattained ? many promises that are yet unfulfilled ? Improve, therefore, the short period that yet remains. Pray without ceasing, that you may attain a ripeness for glory, that you may come to the "grave in full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." Often meditate on the piety of those who have gone before you, especially of those who are recorded in the sacred volume as our exemplars. Reflect on the time you have lost ; the account you will shortly have to render ; the trial that awaits you. Consider especially the example of your Redeemer : think how he spent the three years which preceded his crucifixion ; how his time was filled up with sermons,

miracles, labours, sufferings, prayers, and kindnesses; and how he employed the forty days which intervened between his resurrection and ascension, in visits of love, counsels of wisdom, and incitements to diligence. Be, therefore, concerned to improve to the latest of your existence the period of your probation, nor think of suspending your exertions in the pursuit of increasing holiness until the bridegroom's approach is announced, that you may go forth with joy to meet him.

Old age, when connected with piety, admits of many consolations. To some of the considerations which are calculated to console the mind of the aged sufferer, I would direct your attention.

That there is nothing peculiar in the afflictions you endure, or which need prevent the enjoyment of internal peace and comfort. The greater part of what you endure has arisen in the common course of nature, and is what you had every reason to expect. Are not the infirmities you experience, such as the dim eye,—the trembling step,—the tottering frame,—the aching limb,—the restless and wearisome nights, the usual attendants of old age? Have you then any just cause to complain of what the constitution of your being imposes on all? Did you expect that for your sake providence would interpose to interrupt the established order of nature? Whether you contemplate the vegetable, the animal, or the intellectual kingdom, you may trace the uniform operation of the same law. Whatever presses towards maturity no sooner reaches that point than it begins to verge towards decay. The feebleness of age is as natural as for the stalk to bend under the ripened ear, or for the autumnal leaf to wither and die. To this law all who have gone before you have submitted, and to it all who come after must submit. It extends alike to all, whether poor or rich,—despised or honoured,—foolish or wise,—yea, wicked or righteous. Such, indeed, was not the original condition of our being. It is the sad consequence of

sin. God made man upright and immortal, but "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Man withers because he is a sinner, and because it is the law of his Creator in reference to him as such, that he shall be tending to the tomb from the first moment of his entrance on his earthly pilgrimage. It is not, however, the trials even of old age that need prevent the enjoyment of peace and consolation. The chief materials of happiness are within us, and are to be found in the favour and enjoyment of God. Without this no age can yield enjoyment. Could you enjoy perpetual youth and vigour, yet, if sin were to reign dominant in your heart, you would be restless and unhappy. Sin and misery are inseparable, and whilst man remains under the control of sin, no outward circumstances, however favourable, can impart true satisfaction and enjoyment. Whereas, to the pious, no period of life is insupportable, because they draw their chief happiness from sources which are independent of age and time. The value of piety does not diminish but increase with advancing years. Its comforts are always efficacious and abundant. I have seen aged persons poor, and infirm, and lonely, yet with a sweeter smile of contentment upon their faces, and a fuller song of praise upon their lips, than is to be met with in situations far more favourable. They have thanked the Lord for a dwelling, in which the eye of contentment saw no meanness; for kindness, in which the heart of gratitude felt nought that was humiliating; and for a solitude, in which the spirit of piety was conscious of no exclusion. The gospel of Christ can make a man happy in all situations. It fixes him on the rock of ages; it purifies his conscience; it delivers him from corroding passions; it introduces him into the element of love; it causes him to abound in hope; it inspires him with a joy unspeakable and full of glory; in a word, it constitutes him "the temple of the Holy Ghost." Who can be happy, or

tranquil, if the christian cannot, since all things are his, and he is Christ's, and Christ is God's?

If old age has its afflictions, it has also its immunities. Take care lest, under the pressure of infirmity and affliction, you should derogate from the bounty of your Maker, and despise those blessings which he accounts precious; among which old age is particularly distinguished. In what a variety of ways has he pointed out the value which he attaches to age. See it in the title which he assumes himself, "the Ancient of days." See it in the judgment denounced against Eli, "there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever." See it in the respect and reverence which he has commanded us to render to the aged, "thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man; I am the Lord." See it in the connexion he hath marked between the ancient and the honourable, "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." Has God put this honour upon you, and will you, because of the trials with which it is attended, ungratefully take it and cast it to the earth? If the inconveniences you experience are many, you have also corresponding advantages. The circle of your enjoyment is contracted; but then you have less to ensnare your affections and to draw you away from God. The world is fading from your view; but then your experience of its vanity and emptiness leaves you nothing to regret in the surrender of it. Few remain who have been your companions in the pilgrimage of life; but then you have fewer cords to bind you down to earth, and a stronger inducement to press forward towards that haven of repose, where you shall join them again, "to know separation no more." Infirmity and weakness press down the body; but then you have less to contend with from that turbulence of passion, and vivacity of spirit, which in earlier life so often betrayed you into excess and indiscretion. You are cut off from the active pursuits of life; but then you

are freed from the toils and anxieties in which you were once involved, and which were so bitterly complained of as hindrances to piety. You are still assailed by trials and temptations ; but then you can look back upon the perils you have escaped, upon the tempests in which you have been preserved, and can gather encouragement from a long and varied experience of the goodness and faithfulness of God. The feebleness of increasing years has benumbed your sensibilities, and almost rendered you incapable of relishing the mercies which remain ; but then it is of little consequence to you, who are very shortly to exchange earth, with its partial and imperfect comforts, for heaven, with its eternal and unutterable joys. You are compelled to spend many of your hours in solitude, or wakefulness ; but then the sphere of your observation and reflection is so much enlarged by a long acquaintance with the world, and with the ways and works of God, as to supply within itself a wide range of improving thought. The changes you have witnessed in the world around you,—the many instructive lessons you have received in your intercourse with your fellow men,—the various incidents which have occurred in your progress through life,—the seasons of delightful communion you have enjoyed in your intercourse with God's people,—the wonderful dealings of God in reference to yourselves and your connexions,—the numberless instances in which God has enlarged your heart in distress, delivered you in danger, blessed you in his ordinances, and succoured you in temptation and despondency ; these are subjects no less interesting than instructive and consoling to the mind. For such benefits as these, have you not cause most thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of heaven ? Do they not afford you ground to pass the remainder of your days in resignation and peace ? For every period of life the providence of God hath prepared its own satisfaction, while his wisdom hath appointed its peculiar trials. No age is doomed to infelicity.

He judges for us in wisdom and tenderness, and will not suffer us to be tried above what we are able to bear.

Aged christians have the promise of effectual support, and of complete deliverance. In youth saints are apt to err on the side of presumption ; in old age on that of despondency. Remembering how difficult they have found it to resist temptation and to bear trials in former days, they shudder at the idea of meeting more formidable ones, with which they must struggle with impaired strength and enfeebled powers ; and as these questions recur to their minds, "if thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses ? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan ?" many gloomy fears and painful forebodings are apt to rise up within them. But the grace of God can fit you for all this, and much more. He can strengthen the bending back, and invigorate the fainting spirit. He will sustain you when staggering under your load. In temptation, he can give you power not only for resistance but for victory ; in affliction, grace to be not only patient but cheerful ; in neglect and ill usage, he can enable you not only to exercise meekness, but to overcome evil with good ; and in death, he can not only calm you with resignation, but elevate you to the full assurance of hope. But, will he do all this ? hear his own words : "fear thou not ; for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." "Even to your old age I am he ; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you ; I have made, and I will bear ; even I will carry, and will deliver you." It is remarkable that in this encouraging promise the idea of divine support is repeated not less than three times : "I will carry,"—"I will bear,"—and again it is said, "I will carry." It is common in the sacred scriptures, when blessings are promised of superior

value, or which, from peculiar circumstances, we are too apt to think unattainable, for the promise to be marked by peculiar strength and solemnity of expression, and to be repeated with a frequency which affectingly indicates the condescension of heaven to human weakness, and powerfully encourages the exercise of confidence and hope in God. So it is here. Knowing the gloom and despondency which is apt to overspread the mind of the aged, when the body sinks into feebleness and decrepitude, and when the mind becomes shattered and bowed down with sorrow, divine mercy reiterates, again and again, the assurance of support and deliverance, and that in a manner the most solemn and impressive. Aged sinner, though heavy be your affliction, yet lift up your head from the staff on which it leans, or from the pillar on which it rests, and listen to the voice of consolation. Say not, what is to become of me? God engages to be your refuge and strength. Without his aid, the most intelligent and powerful of his creatures cannot stand; with it, the feeblest shall not fail, even under severe and lengthened affliction. What was Paul's support in a time of severe trial and weakness? "my grace is sufficient for thee." So shall it be with you. He who enabled Paul to rejoice in his infirmities can and will enable you to do so also. And he who is with you in old age, will be with you to eternity. The deliverances which you have already experienced are pledges of that complete salvation which awaits you at death; a salvation which shall leave no stain upon your robe, no imperfection in your nature, no corruption in your heart, no tear in your eye, no evil in your lot; a salvation which shall give you everlasting strength for decay, the perfection of beauty for wrinkles, "the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The valley which lies between you have yet to cross; it may appear dark, and the path may be new and untrodden, but say with David, "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

The consideration of the nearness of salvation should reconcile you to affliction and death. Be your affliction ever so distressing,—be the burden of infirmity, sickness, sorrow, and desertion, ever so heavy, still there remains this consolation,—it is not long before the weary shall be at rest. Having passed through so many of the toils of life, you may surely now, when your pilgrimage is coming to a close, bear without impatience the hardships of its concluding stage. You are in a little time to inherit a kingdom, and will you complain of present pains and losses? He who is the occupant of a cottage, though it be mean, its furniture scanty, and the winds of heaven blowing through its shattered roof and decayed walls, may well submit to its inconveniences, if to-morrow he is to exchange it for a mansion. The mariner who has been long at sea, and has passed through innumerable perils, when he comes at length in sight of his native land, and sees the long desired haven before him, thinks not, in the joyous anticipation of the blessings and welcome of home, of the remaining toils that must intervene. And with heaven fully in your view, can you complain of the evils which attend the last stage of your existence here? Though the voice of sorrow is heard in the house of your pilgrimage, the mansions of joy are opening to receive you, and calling you to the melodies of eternal peace. At every sigh and tear you may say, I have another tear less to shed, and another sigh less to heave, and your “light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Such a prospect should lead you to regard your present trials with joyfulness, and death itself with desire. Could an heathen say, “if God would offer me the choice of renewing my age, and returning to my first childhood, I should heartily refuse it, for I should be loath after I have passed so much of my race to be called back from the goal to the bars of my first setting out;” and shall christians have any lingering desires

to continue on the borders of the grave, when every tie which connects them with life is broken? Let the wicked fear to die, for fearful is the fate that awaits them; the sorrows they endure here are but the beginning of their woes; every step brings them nearer, not only to the grave, but to the eternal gulf; they are hastening where there is darkness and no light, sorrow and no joy, torment and no end, no intermission; death to them is the officer sent to arrest them, and to deliver them to the judge, that the judge may deliver them to the tormentors; but it comes to you in a different form, as a black messenger, it is true, but still a messenger of mercy, sent by your heavenly Father to remove you from all that pains and oppresses you, and to introduce you to the reign of life, to the society of the celestial temple, and to the enjoyment of the paradise of God."

How blessed is your condition contrasted with that of the aged transgressor. How many there are of this description. It is always affecting to contemplate the condition of a sinner. The most attractive circumstances ought never to hide from our view the fearful destiny which hangs over his guilty head. When surrounded by the splendours of wealth, the gaieties of pleasure, and the flatteries of the world; when exhibiting the interest of youth, and the sprightliness of wit, we ought not to forget, that these circumstances do not in the least alter his condition in relation to God, nor can they avert the punishment that awaits him. But in the case of the aged transgressor, who is become grey in iniquity; who, throughout a lengthened life, has persisted in impenitence; whose habits of irreligion and contempt of God are all rooted and confirmed; who is seen cleaving to sin, even when the power of enjoyment has left him; who, at the time when the world is forsaking him, still clings to it with eager and pertinacious grasp, and evinces an anxiety to put away the thought of death in proportion to the nearness of its approach; there is in his case

a variety of circumstances peculiarly affecting. There is an aggravation connected with his guilt, and an hopelessness attaching to his condition, which do not belong to the earlier stages of existence. On him the mercies of a lengthened life have been bestowed in vain ; multiplied years have only served to multiply his sins ; life is coming to a close, and yet not one day has been spent to any good purpose : nothing has been done for the soul and for eternity. Hope, which in other cases supports us, fails us here ; for how difficult is the conversion of an aged transgressor. Miserable is his situation even now. Under the distresses which embitter old age he has none of the comforts of religion to support him. His nights are wakeful, but he has no pleasing recollections on the past to cheer his solitary hours ; his flesh is pained, but he has no consoling prospects in the future to mitigate his sufferings. Instead of having reason to expect relief under his burden of infirmity, it is aggravated by a sense of unpardoned sin. In a short time God will take him away from the frailties of age, but it will be to deliver him to the pains of hell. The sins of a long life must be answered for. These require a furnace seven times hotter than usual, and they will have it. This life has been a treasuring up of wrath against the day of wrath. You have seen the agonies of a suffering infant ; and did not the thought strike you, if original sin is thus punished, what do the transgressions of a long life deserve ? If those things are done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry ? It is truly painful to behold such characters, and from them the mind eagerly turns away to mark the aged saint, rich in faith, and mature in holiness. The one is like a stagnant pool, in whose dark and corrupt waters venomous creatures have been multiplying, and rank weeds and noisome exhalations make it the object of disgust ; the other is like the stream purifying in its course, and flowing onward to the sea with a current clear yet majestic. Be thank-

ful, christian reader, to him who hath made thee thus to differ ; ascribe it entirely to the riches of God's grace, and be it your great concern that the last portion of your existence may, beyond every preceding one, tend to "shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into marvellous light."

AFFLICTION IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH.

If sin be pardon'd, I'm secure,
Death has no sting beside;
The law gives sin its dreaded power,
But Christ for sin has died.

"THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW
OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME;
THY ROD AND THY STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME."

PSALM XXIII., IV.

DEATH is an event which it is impossible for the human mind to contemplate with indifference: in itself it is awful, the object of instinctive aversion; every thing that has life flees from it, and manifests the primary aim of all its powers and faculties to be preservation, or the avoidance of that state which terminates existence. Dreadful as death is to all sentient beings that move on the face of the earth, it is yet more dreadful to man, to whom, by his circumstances, it is most important, because by the gift of reason he is qualified to reflect on its evils; to him as existence is more dignified, so it is more sweet, and he clings to it with proportionate tenaciousness. To resign this pleasing conscious being, and to die, is a revolting thought. Who hath not trembled in the anticipation? Who hath not felt unutterable emotions as he hath beheld the victim of death stretched forth in humiliation and helplessness? for how much there is in death to excite melan-

choly and dread. There is the novelty of the case. Who knows what it is to die? No one has ever returned from the struggle to tell us what is meant by a conflict with the last enemy, and our own experience can furnish us with no assistance; imagination, therefore, which usually magnifies an unknown evil, is left to cherish its worst and most gloomy anticipations. There is a dissolution of our connexion with the present world; with all those scenes with which we have been sensibly conversant, and of which alone we have any clear and adequate ideas; and with all those endeared objects to whom nature or friendship hath intimately united our hearts, and from whom to be separated is as the rending asunder of our own flesh. There is the destruction of the body, that marvellous fabric, which in its contrivance and execution displays in so striking a manner the wisdom and skill of the great Creator. How awful the stroke which dislodges the soul from its earthly tabernacle, and reduces the body, now warm and animated, and which we can hardly look upon without regarding it as our very self, into a lifeless clod, a foul mass of corruption and rottenness. There are all the fearful harbingers of dissolution. Death is usually preceded by agonizing pains and afflictions. The house must be shaken before it comes down. The fortress must be assaulted before a breach can be effected. The vessel must be tossed by the storm before it is broken to pieces. These are circumstances afflictive in themselves, but peculiarly fearful as precursors of this great adversary. There is, too, all that follows death. It is the gate to eternity. It conducts us into the presence of the just and holy One. It places us before the tribunal of divine justice. It connects us either with heaven or hell, and affixes to our destiny the seal of eternal happiness, or eternal woe. No wonder, therefore, that men should regard it with apprehension and repugnance, and that through the fear of death they should be all their life-time subject to bondage. Some, indeed,

display a total carelessness respecting it, but this is often more affected than real; they assume a kind of sportiveness and levity for the purpose of proving how devoid they are of fear, when in fact it is the result of its prevalence. So the school-boy passes the church yard,

“ Whistling aloud to keep his courage up.”

But when death actually presents itself before them, then their boasted courage fails, then fear comes upon them like an armed man, and their terror is proportioned to their former levity and carelessness. There are others who seem to live regardless of death, in consequence of a studious endeavour to keep the subject out of sight. It is their constant solicitude to banish it to a distance. They put far from them the evil day. They try to drown all reflections on their mortality amidst the anxieties of business, the vicissitudes of pleasure, and the excitement of company. But who can be always engaged? who can succeed entirely in keeping out of sight a dreaded and a hated object? how many events are occurring daily to obtrude upon our minds the frailty of our nature, and the assurance that we too must die; and the uneasiness of mind which is evinced when the subject is forced upon their revolting attention, shews how much they are haunted by the dread of death. Some there are, who, by infidelity, vain reasonings, and dissipation, succeed in preserving a kind of composure to the last; they carry a heedless spirit even to their dying bed; the insensibility which has marked their life, characterizes their death also; and by their mistaken and ill-judging, or perhaps deceiving friends, they are represented as dying like lambs, when the only lamb-like characteristic they exhibit, is a strange senselessness and stupidity of mind. This final insensibility may be partly induced by disease, which weakens the capacity of thinking, and prevents them

from coming to a just conclusion concerning their past conduct, their present condition, or their future prospects. Nor is it unreasonable to believe, that this may be the result of a judicial dispensation of God. We know that he has given men up "to strong delusion that they should believe a lie." In what case can such a dispensation be supposed with more propriety, than in that of gross, long-continued, and obstinate sin, perpetrated by a heart hardening itself in iniquity through life. The fear of death is naturally unavoidable, and must, therefore, of itself be innocent; it operates universally, on every part of the brute creation as well as on every individual of the human race, perpetually, under all circumstances, the most distressing as well as the most pleasing, and with a force peculiar to itself. But this instinctive repulsion in man is not merely the natural dread of suffering; it is produced also by a sense of guilt, and a painful apprehension of punishment. These constitute what the apostle Paul calls death's sting. It is felt most by him who is most aware of the sad truth and reality of his condition. If men succeed in blunting its point, it is through a delusion which makes their case the more hopeless; whilst the calm which is thus obtained is only temporary, and resembles that death-like stillness which sometimes precedes an earthquake. Never can death be encountered with tranquillity, and confidence, and hope, until its sting is extracted by the free and full forgiveness of all our sins. When we have just ground for concluding that our peace is made with God, when we possess a clear sense of pardoning and sanctifying mercy, enjoy the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and can look to him as our protector and friend, then may we imitate the faith and hope of the Psalmist, "yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." O, how many of the Lord's people have left the world with peace and joy. O,

how much of heaven has breathed in their spirit and conversation. They have died full of holy confidence and rejoicing. Longing to depart, they have cried, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." This is commonly the case with those who die in the Lord. It has been the case even with martyrs, with those who have had to encounter death in its most terrifying forms; men, women, and children, have embraced the stake, and welcomed the flames with joy and exultation. It has been the case not merely with the poor, the despised, the outcast, but with such as have had every thing agreeable in their condition, and attractive in their connexions. They have said to those whom they were leaving, "You are dear; many are the comforts I have realized in your society, and in your kind and affectionate attentions; you are loved as the kind gifts of a gracious Saviour; but I am going from the gifts to the giver, from the streams to the fountain. I leave you to find infinitely more in Christ." And so clear have been their prospects, so lively and animating their foretastes of future bliss, so abundant have been their consolations, and so firm their confidence, that filled with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, they have exclaimed with surprise,

"Tell me, my soul, can this be death."

Yea, this has often been the case with those who during their life time have been the subjects of distressing doubts and fears. When the trying hour has arrived, they have had grace according to their day; the darkness, which in the distance excited so much alarm, has been gradually dispersed as they have approached; the spot which they feared would prove the scene of their defeat, has become the scene of their triumph; and they have left the world exclaiming, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord

Jesus Christ." Still, it must be admitted, that death often becomes a source of temptation to those who are endeavouring to prepare for it. Though death may be rendered harmless, yet its appearance is always repulsive. It is still a declaration of God's displeasure against sin, and naturally excites anxiety and forebodings. The prospects on the other side of Jordan may be attracting and animating, and yet the sight of its deep and troubled waters may cause an inward shrinking. When David says, "I will fear no evil," he speaks of his anticipation as an attainment, and intimates that the fear which he was enabled to defy was much connected with the event itself. Let us look at the case, and see what are the remedies which the gospel supplies to those who place their trust in Christ Jesus.

Christ has taken from death its fearful curse. If divine grace had not interposed, death has a sting with which he would pierce every transgressor, and send him to a state of interminable misery. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." Death derives its wounding power from sin, and sin from the law that forbids it, that discovers its nature, and denounces its punishment. That punishment consists not merely in the dissolution of the body, but also in the death of the soul, that is, the perpetual loss of all hope; an exclusion from the favour and presence of God; and a sense of his eternal wrath, which burns like a devouring fire. It was impossible that this curse should be removed unless some one could be found to expiate our offences, and, by becoming our surety, to bear away the penalty from us by sustaining it himself. This Christ undertook, and this he effected by his incarnation and sufferings. His incarnation rendered him capable of suffering, whilst his sufferings derived such an infinite value and dignity from his divinity, that his death was equivalent to the destruction of all our race; and, in lieu of our perdition, it was accepted as

“an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savour.” Every moral purpose that could have been answered by the punishment of the sinner has been better subserved by the death of the Saviour; “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit; for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death.” Though death remain, yet to them it is no longer penal; they have no fear of the consequences, from which comes the deepest sting. “Christ hath redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them.” But it may be asked, if Christ has redeemed them, bearing their sin in his own body on the tree, and they are justified by his blood, and saved from wrath by him, why do they yet die? To which I answer, they die as they suffer affliction. Affliction is not a judicial visitation, but corrective and medicinal; and though, like all natural evil, derived originally from sin, yet, as God employs it, it is the effect and token of his love. Christ has abolished death, so far as it is a curse, and thus the christian does not die; hence in the scriptures the death of the saints is called a sleep. Saint Paul argues, “if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” It is observable how the apostle varies the expression, Jesus died, and the saints sleep in him; for he sustained death in all its terrors, that it might be a calm sleep to his people. Sleep has nothing formidable in it; a weary man, after a day of toil, feels no reluctance to lie down on his bed; such is the representation given of a believer’s death in the scriptures, and it is so essentially just, that it is said of Stephen, though he suffered a death of violence, “he fell asleep.” Yes, being reconciled to God through the blood of Christ, they have nothing to apprehend from death, but with sweet tranquillity may resign their souls into the hands

of their Redeemer, "Lord, now letteth thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." When death comes to such, he sometimes put on an air of stern severity, produces a warrant from the law, the purport of which is, "the soul that sinneth it shall die;" and then, seizing them by the throat, cries, "pay me that thou owest;" but they can view the procedure without dismay, and reply with holy confidence, "thou hast no demand on me; what the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, but I am not under the law but under grace; and 'who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'" This it is which made a dying christian say, "dying in Christ is nothing;" and this it is that enables the believer to triumph over death, to smile in death, and with his last quivering breath to say, "O death, where is thy sting?"

Death is not an untrodden path. If you were the only person in the world exposed to death, you might naturally look upon it with terror, as upon some strange and unknown thing that was to happen to you; but it is the way appointed "for all living." "Fear not the sentence of death," says the son of Sirach; "remember them that have been before thee, and that come after; for this is the sentence of the Lord upon all flesh; and why art thou against the pleasure of the Most High?" It is a way that has been trodden by all who lived before us; by all the servants of God, Enoch and Elijah alone excepted. "Abraham is dead, and the prophets" are dead. Many of our acquaintance, many, it may be, of our dearest friends and relatives, have passed before us through the dark valley; and why should we fear to follow in the same path in which they have travelled? The same divine mercy and protection, the same rod and staff which supported and

comforted those who have died in the faith and love of God, are ready to support and comfort us also, if we, through the grace of God, are partakers of their faith and patience. The bodily pain of dying is by many viewed with alarm, although, perhaps, backward to confess it; but this, in many instances, is so slight as scarcely to be perceptible. With many it is nothing more than gently falling into a deep sleep, from which they do not again awake in this world. Some, whose bodies have been worn out by sickness and infirmity, at length gradually cease to breathe, and descend into the valley of the shadow of death almost without being aware of it. Sometimes, no doubt, the pangs of death are painful and severe, but when acute they are generally soon over, and probably, in most cases, are not sharper than what have been repeatedly endured in some period of life. But, however severe, we know they will be as nothing to those who are animated by faith in Jesus, who enjoy his presence and the supports of his grace, and who possess a hope full of immortality. We know that christian martyrs in the first ages of the church, and many who in different ages since then have suffered death for the cause of Jesus, not only met their sufferings fearlessly, but even with desire. They were enabled to rest their faith so stedfastly upon the captain of their salvation, who was himself made perfect through suffering, and to fix their minds so intently upon the glory that awaited them, that they seemed hardly to feel the excruciating tortures to which they were exposed. They felt that their light affliction, which would endure comparatively for a moment, was working out for them "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." One of these, when informed by his jaoler that he would have to suffer on the following day, instantly knelt down, and exclaimed, "I thank thee, O God, that thou art at length about to confer upon me an honour I have so much desired." Did they triumph in the prospect of

death when surrounded by every circumstance of terror, and shall we faint in the prospect of enduring the ordinary death of men? They died in the midst of enemies,—you will die probably in the midst of friends; their's was a bed of fire,—O what a contrast is your's, made smooth and soft by the hand of unwearied affection; they saw nothing in their last moments but the glaring eyes of their infuriated murderers,—but you are surrounded by kind and sympathizing friends; their ears heard no sounds but those of rage and enmity,—your's are favoured with the expressions of love and duty; their pains were unmitigated by any earthly comfort,—but you have many alleviations to assuage your sufferings, and to sweeten the bitterness of death. How ought these considerations to check every fearful and repining emotion, and to inspire confidence and gratitude.

All the circumstances of our death are under the controul of Christ. This is a consideration well calculated to dissipate our anxieties, and to fortify our courage. It should remove all solicitude as to the time of our departure. If the affliction should terminate in death, it is the appointment of infinite wisdom and love; it is because the Saviour in whom we trust is summoning us away. Shall we then rebel against his appointment? shall we impugn the wisdom or the kindness of his determination? or, ignorant as we are of what is before us in the world, and of what really concerns our best interests, can we entertain the wish, that the power of determining the time of our death were wrested out of his hands, and placed in our own? True, we may have many ties that attach us to the world,—we may be called away in the midst of our earthly engagements and pursuits, when life may appear to be most desirable,—we may have a young and dependent family whom we are loath to leave behind us to the cold charities of the world,—we may have many dependents on our industry, or charity, who may bitterly regret our loss,

but do we imagine that these considerations are unknown to Christ, or that he has not weighed them all? and if, notwithstanding, it be his will to summon us away, ought we not to yield up our judgment to his? It should remove all anxiety as to the circumstances of our departure. We know as little of the manner, as of the time of our death. It may be that we shall quit the world with ease, or with difficulty; by a sudden stroke, or by protracted suffering; we may be vividly conscious, or in a state of partial aberration, or total insensibility; these possibilities are apt to be converted by a melancholy temperament into food for anxious disquietude and fretting care; but matters it, after all, in what circumstances we die? they must in all cases be known to him in whose wisdom we confide, and of whose interest in our welfare we have the strongest assurance. He watches over the dissolution of his people, and keeps his eye, not only on the busy scenes of life, but also on the secret mysteries of death. Unknown, then, as are the circumstances under which you must finally leave the world, you may venture to commit yourself into his hands. Nothing connected with your dissolution can happen by chance; neither can it be the result of capriciousness, nor neglect; but every thing flows from that unerring wisdom whose counsels are formed on a view of all possible relations and consequences, whether as to visible or invisible, the present or the future states of being; and of that unvarying love which always selects that which is the best promotive of the real welfare of the saints.

We have not to pass through the valley of death alone. It is true that the society of all earthly friends we must leave behind us. Friends and family may stand around our couch, and watch the progress of dissolution, but they cannot accompany us; neither are they sensible of what we feel, nor able in any way to help or deliver us. The spirit departs alone, and in that awful hour of separation from human fellowship,

in that solitude of death, when, placed on the verge of the invisible world, we know that all behind must be forsaken, and we are ignorant of what we may meet with as we advance; oh! how consolatory to reflect, that there is one being who will not forsake us, who will take us up when other friends forsake us or must be left behind; and he has power, absolute power, over all our spiritual foes. He has himself drunk the cup before us, and tasted the bitterness; he has travelled through the dark valley, and knows every inch of the road; and knows by experience what strength and succour we need in that dreadful hour. Dark, then, as is the passage, and unknown as are its dangers and pains, surely we may venture to commit ourselves into his hands; so long as we can rely on the certainty of his presence and support, we can have no just cause for fear. How many a christian has been heard to say,

“ O, if my Lord would come and meet,
 My soul should stretch her wings in haste,
 Fly fearless through death's iron gate,
 Nor fear the terrors as she pass'd.”

This he does; he stands at the gate of death ready to receive us, to disperse the darkness, to establish our faith, to enliven our hope, and to make all grace abound towards us in the time of need; and as we approach, he whispers into the soul, “fear not, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness.”

Death possesses only a partial and limited power. It extends only over the corporeal and mortal part of our nature; it cannot hold or detain the immortal spirit. Some have, indeed, imagined that the soul remains in an unconscious state from the period of death until the morning of the

resurrection, and have endeavoured to support this extraordinary hypothesis by the reasonings of an unhallowed philosophy; for is not that an unhallowed philosophy which respects not the dictates of christianity, and allows itself only to be guided by the inspired writers so far as they sanction its own speculations, but when there is any disagreement, assumes that itself is the infallible guide to truth? The conscious existence of the soul after death has been denied by some persons who have professed to receive the christian system, and this shews the evil consequences of indulging the daring and licentious habit of philosophizing on subjects which are determined by the scriptures. I will not interrupt your better feelings by any attempt to lead you into the gloomy labyrinth of controversy. It is sufficient to remark, that Christ and his apostles inculcated a system unspeakably more interesting. They have placed the subject beyond all doubt. It would be so much of a detraction if we could suppose the soul of any saint to cease to be conscious of the presence of God, or of its own existence, for one or more ages; but the scriptures inspire other views; Jesus said to the penitent thief, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise." When Stephen closed his eyes under the stones of his murderers, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Paul believed that to be absent from the body was to be "present with the Lord;" and he desired "to depart and to be with Christ," which, he says, "is far better." Now if the apostle did not believe that his soul would be immediately with Christ, his language was perfectly unintelligible; for by dying he would have been no sooner with Christ than he would by remaining alive, as to time; nor so near as to enjoyment, for here he had access to him, and intercourse with him. The death of the saint then is but partial. As in the ceremony of purification from leprosy, one bird was killed, and the other left to fly in the open air, the mysterious shadow of the leper being restored to a state of

liberty ; so when the body dies, and returns to the earth, the emancipated soul flies to the Father of spirits, the fountain of life. The death of a saint is a new birth, and the pains he experiences are the throes by which the ripened soul is delivered into the land of the living, and introduced to the immediate presence of Jesus. O, delightful thought ! to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord ; no longer to see through a glass darkly, but face to face ; no longer to know in part, but to know even as we are known ; to see Jesus as he is ; to fall down before the Lamb, and to ascribe to him blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever !

Death will be productive of immense advantage. The scriptures teach us that to the believer death is gain. Death as well as life is included in the covenant of God's grace. "All things are your's," says an apostle, "whether life or death." That last enemy, through heavenly love, is constrained to become a friend. To the christian, death terminates his labours and his dangers, concludes his trials and his conflicts ; it realizes to him his largest hopes, puts him in complete possession of those blessings to which in prospect he has long looked forward, turns his faith into hope, his hope into enjoyment, and admits him to the full and unrestrained participation of those rivers of pleasure, of which in this life he has experienced only occasional and limited supplies. O, what a contrast does every departing saint experience as he passes, by death, from time to eternity,—from this world with all its cares and sorrows, to the bliss and glory of the heavenly inheritance ! However "meetened for their inheritance ;" however "wrought for the self same thing ;" yet the transition from the extreme of weakness and suffering,—from the overwhelming abasement, and rending struggle of the mortal strife, into the sudden brightness, and perfect rapture of the heavenly vision, and this too in "a moment, in the twinkling

of an eye ;" such a transition it is impossible to describe, for the single step appropriates heaven, and the single moment commences eternity.

" In vain our feeble fancy paints
The moment after death,
The glory that surrounds the saints
When yielding up their breath.

One gentle sigh their fetters breaks ;
We scarce can say they're gone,
Before the willing spirit takes
Her mansion near the throne."

Gaze on the expiring,—the glorified christian : at one moment seized by death ; the next free from its grasp for ever ! At one moment filled with the deep consciousness of imperfection and manifold infirmities ; the next standing unblameable and unreprouable in the sight of God ! At one moment racked by pain and wasted by disease ; the next putting forth the vigour of immortal youth ! At one moment what all must pity ; the next, what all must envy ! At one moment surrounded with tears and sighs ; the next with smiles and acclamations ! At one moment lamented by mortals ; the next greeted by angels and the spirits of just men made perfect ! At one moment gasping in agony and convulsion ; the next pouring forth the melody of a ceaseless song ! At one moment the nerveless emaciated hand just raised by its attendants ; the next waving a palm of victory, and striking a harp of gold ! At one moment the parched lip gently touched with moisture ; the next drinking of those rivers of pleasure which flow from the throne of God and the Lamb ! At one moment the darkened chamber, accommodated to the fading sense, and concealing the appalling form of death ; the next shining out like a sun in the kingdom of his Father ! O, happy and transporting change for the holy soul that thus

passes from the gloomy chamber of sickness to the bright and healthful region of the paradise above! from dying pains to boundless bliss; from the converse of sinful mortals to the presence of an infinitely gracious and glorious God; from a contentious and tumultuous world, to endless peace, and rest, and love! Well may such a soul whilst engaged in the mortal struggle exclaim,

“ Sing with me! sing with me!
Weeping brethren, sing with me!
For now an open heaven I see.
How my soul this earth despises;
How my heart its spirit rises;
Bounding from the flesh I sever,
World of sin, adieu for ever!

Sing with me! sing with me!
Friends of Jesus, sing with me!
All my sufferings, all my woe,
All my griefs I here forego.
Farewell terrors, sighing, grieving,
Praying, hearing, and believing,
Earthly trusts, and all its wrongings,
Earthly love, and all its longings!

Sing with me! sing with me!
Blessed spirits, sing with me!
To the lamb our song shall be,
Through a glad eternity.
Farewell earthly morn and even,
Sun, and moon, and stars of heaven!
Heavenly portals ope before me,
Welcome Christ in all thy glory!”

Reader, has God made you a partaker of his grace?
Have you a personal interest in the mercy of God through
Christ Jesus? Have you, as a penitent and believing
sinner, taken refuge in the blood of the atonement? then let

not the prospect of death excite alarm. Fear not. Encourage yourself in the Lord your God. Guard against all fleshly reasonings,—all anxiety respecting your departure. “Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.” Your duty has only to do with the present, and the grace you have to seek is grace to help in time of need; suffering grace for suffering times, and dying grace for a dying hour. This is promised; “my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Who hath said this? He who cannot lie; he who is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” who hath the keys of death and of hell; who in all cases is able to keep that which is committed to him against that great day. Be not faithless then, but believing. The only real object of dread in death is sin; in this is the sting; and if Christ hath delivered you from sin, in the guilt, and power, and love thereof, and if you are earnestly seeking to be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, death can have no power to injure you; the sting is extracted; you shall be victorious; and when death is vanquished, all his precursors, appendages, and consequences shall fall with him; nothing shall remain but salvation, glory, and eternal life.

AFFLICTION TERMINATING IN HEAVEN.

Hear what God the Lord hath spoken :—

O my people, faint and few,
Comfortless, afflicted, broken,
Fair abodes I build for you ;
Thorns of heartfelt tribulation
Shall no more perplex your ways,
Ye shall name your walls salvation,
And your gates shall all be praise.

Ye no more your suns descending,
Waning moons no more shall see,
But your griefs for ever ending,
Find eternal noon in me.
God shall rise, and shining o'er you,
Change to day the gloom of night ;
He, the Lord, shall be your glory,
God your everlasting light.

“ THOU WILT SHEW ME THE PATH OF LIFE ; IN THY PRESENCE IS FULNESS OF JOY ; AT THY RIGHT HAND ARE PLEASURES FOR EVERMORE.”

PSALM XVI., XI.

It was said of Socrates, that he brought down philosophy from heaven to earth, because he drew men from the immoderate contemplation of the heavenly bodies, and directed their attention to the nature and end of man, and to his appropriate duties and relations in the present world. But

Jesus Christ draws men from earth to heaven. He teaches them a divine philosophy, and elevates them from things seen, and temporal, and earthly, to things spiritual, and heavenly, and eternal. Indeed, there is no subject to which the scriptures more frequently invite our attention than this. Whatever be our condition in the world, whether we are in prosperity or adversity, in health or sickness, they constantly call upon us to consider the connexion of the life that now is with that life of blessedness in heaven which is the ultimate design of the Almighty concerning his rational offspring. And how fitted is the revelation of such a state to awaken his attention, and enkindle the desire of every one that is an heir of immortality ; and how well calculated to support and animate the mind beneath the pressure of pain and suffering ! By it the first christians were encouraged to endure all those trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonments, of tortures and death, to which they were called for the sake of Christ. Indeed, what are the trials of life, or the terrors of death, when compared with the "exceeding weight of glory" which is to be revealed. Shall we sink or falter by the way when we know that we are journeying to a land of everlasting rest, and shall soon reach our eternal home? Shall the dark valley affright us, when we see beyond it the fields of immortality smiling in the beauty of an eternal spring? Destined as we are for heaven, shall we grieve or murmur that earth is not found to be a suitable resting place, and that God checks every tendency to rest here by sharp afflictions and severe disappointments? Nay, not only should the hope of heaven prevent us from complaining of the afflictions of life, but the thought that these afflictions are preparing for that blessed state,—that they are ordained as necessary and useful means of discipline to promote our progress towards it,—that they are the furnace by which the dross is to be purged away, and we are to be purified for the master's

use, should induce cheerful submission, and grateful acknowledgment; and lead us to pray earnestly that in due time we may be presented faultless and blameless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy. It concerns the suffering and dying christian to be much engaged in meditating on the prospect of a blessed immortality. The hope of heaven, either directly or indirectly, is the chief source of his consolation and joy. Here the saints of God, in every age, have found comfort. David indulged the sublimities of christian hope, and exclaimed, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Habbakuk says, "although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." The author of the seventy-third Psalm, appealing to Jehovah, declares, "thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." All believers "rejoice in hope," and are patient, and may "glory in tribulation," knowing that their "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" whilst they look not at the things seen, which are temporal, but at the things not seen, which are eternal. Heaven is the perfect state of the christian, both in respect of happiness and character;—the consummation of all his toils,—the recompense of all his sufferings,—the realization of all his hopes;—and, surely, it is well that he who has begun the race, should keep his eye fixed on the goal;—that he who has begun the combat, should encourage himself by the glory of the coming triumph;—that he who is struggling with the storm, should anticipate the haven of repose, the welcome of friends, and

the comforts of home. Suffering christian! have you the prospect opened before you of future and eternal blessedness? then let me call upon you to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Let not any distressing anxieties, or gloomy forebodings, mar your joy. Whatever are, or may be, your sufferings here, you shall be happy through all eternity. Look forward to your final destination, and let the glory that awaits you fill your minds, and animate your hearts. If Cato and Cleombratus, two heathens, after reading Plato's book on the immortality of the soul, voluntarily put an end to their existence, the one falling on his sword, and the other throwing himself from a precipice, that they might the sooner partake of the joys of futurity; what a shame is it for christians, who have life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, to be found shrinking from suffering, or even death itself, with heaven fully in their view. Let me aid you, then, in your meditations, and direct your attention to some of the leading features of this most delightful topic. Heaven is to be regarded as a state of perfect blessedness. To this three conditions are essential:—there must be an exemption from all evils,—there must be the concurrence of all positive excellencies,—and there must be attached to these permanent duration of existence.

An exemption from all evils is the first condition of perfect blessedness. This world is justly styled "a vale of tears." Distress awaits us here in a thousand forms. Within us it dwells, without it assails. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." To all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease in his condition. Our bodies are subjected to the evils of hunger and thirst, of cold and heat, of weariness and languor, of sickness and pain, of disease and death. Our pursuits are attended by disappointment, vexation, and distress. Our friends and families are in want, pain, and sorrow; they sicken and

die ; their sins disgrace them, and wound us, and awaken many anxieties respecting their future destiny. Our fellow men often harass and distress us by their injustice, their falsehood, and their oppressions. To beings habituated to a state of existence so extensively formed of these distressing materials, how welcome must be the heavenly state. In that peaceful rest, no sensation of thirst, of hunger, of languor, of poverty, shall trouble us more. Disease and pain shall no more put us to the torture ;—there shall be no complaining of the treachery of false friends, or of the wickedness, the calumnies, the injustice, of avowed enemies ;—the relation will no more weep for the relation, for all tears shall be wiped away from all eyes. Now this will be no trifling attainment ; to have blessings without change, health without sickness, and pleasure without pain ;—the bloom without the blight, the sunshine without the cloud, peace that nothing can disturb, happiness that nothing can alloy. How delightful, how exhilarating the prospect !

“ With joy the sailor, long by ocean tost,
Spreads all his canvass for the distant coast.
With joy the hind, his daily labour done,
Sees the broad shadows, and the setting sun.
With joy the slave, worn out with tedious woes,
Beholds the bliss that liberty bestows.”

And if the sailor thus joys, though the tempest must be again braved ; and the labourer, though the morrow’s sun must awaken him to new toils ; and the slave, though for a time he must still wear the galling chain ; what is that joy that must be felt, when the howl of the last tempest has died away ; when the last labour is completed ; when the last pang of misery has escaped the heart ; and the last tear is dried up ? O, happy, happy day ! when there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away.”

Human life is not only exposed to misery and affliction, but also to moral evil, which is much more to be feared than all the evils of suffering, of which it is the source. Christians, though delivered from the power of sin, are still exposed to its assaults. They are assailed, on all hands, by the motions of the flesh, by the solicitations of the wicked, by the contagion of evil example, by the temptations of the world and of the devil. This life, therefore, is one of conflict; nor can they maintain their consistency and hope but by strenuous exertions. An apostle compares the christian life to that which requires the strongest efforts. The christian is to be armed from head to foot, and "to fight the good fight of faith." He is opposed in the career of holy duty, and must wrestle not only "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." A race is set before him, and he is to "forget those things which are behind, and to reach forth unto those which are before;" he must press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Such a state is incompatible with complete enjoyment. It is a state of happiness, but the enjoyment is not perfect. Can that be a state of complete happiness in which you are to watch every moment lest your heart depart from the living God? in which the heart requires so many motives to keep it right, and which after all leaves us to lament over so many defects? in which we are every where in danger; in speaking and in silence, in solitude and in society, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity, in riches and in poverty? But shall we have to struggle with those evils in heaven? Ah, no! temptation shall never enter there. The heart will then move upwards towards God by its own nature; there will be no flesh to render nugatory the pious volitions of the spirit. Satan, though he could ascend to the top of the temple of Jerusalem, shall not be permitted to enter the temple of glory, or

the heavenly Jerusalem. Sin shall have no place there, and shall be no longer able to make use either of our own flesh, or of the evil example of others, to seduce us. Then our struggles will be all over, our conflicts for ever ended. Enemies can no more assault, error no more mislead, temptation no more harass. O, happy they who thus rest in the presence of their God! Where there is temptation, there is also fear,—a fear of falling away from God, of which we ought never to divest ourselves in this world. This is the guard of our piety, and hence it is said, “blessed is the man that feareth always.” “Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.” No fear, however, is consistent with perfect enjoyment. Our present state, whatever be the measure of our piety, is not one of absolute safety, and therefore not one of perfect enjoyment. “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection,” says the apostle, “lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Who can but fear when his immortal spirit is trembling between heaven and hell? The grace of God in the soul is compared to seed sown in the earth: to how many hazards is it exposed before it becomes rooted in the ground; and after it has sprung up,—from the blade to the full corn in the ear,—how many threatening dangers keep our fears alive; nor are those fears removed until it is gathered into the garner. This is the state of the blessed in heaven;—they are safely housed;—no longer in the field endangered by storm and blight, but gathered into the garner, where fear cannot enter; and where, secured from all possibility of falling, they may give full scope to their joy. Their residence in heaven will be permanent;—they shall no more go out. The gates of the celestial city shut the wicked out, and the righteous in. Freed, therefore, from every source of distress, from all occasion of toil and of fear, there will be no drawback upon their felicity,—no coun-

teracting influence to diminish, or to interrupt the tide of their bliss.

A concurrence of all positive excellencies is essential to perfect blessedness. Here our views must necessarily be feeble and contracted. We can think of the excellencies of heaven only according to the poverty of our understanding. Sufficient, however, may be known to sweeten all the bitterness of this world, and to render insipid all its sweetness. What, then, are we allowed to reckon upon as the grand component parts of this exalted state, as to positive enjoyment? You may reckon upon

*The perfection of your nature. To begin with the soul. There are three general operations of which the soul is capable, and which constitute sources of action and pleasure almost innumerable. These are knowing, living, and feeling. In this world, these operations are either obstructed, or misapplied, by the influence of sin and imperfection; and, consequently, the happiness which might result from them is impeded or destroyed; but, in the heavenly state, the soul is renewed to a state of absolute perfection; its natural faculties are strengthened and enlarged, and its moral powers refined and purified, to the highest degree imaginable; the result must be the enjoyment of perfect felicity. Observe the effect as to *knowledge*. "Now we know but in part;" this is owing to that defectiveness of vision, and that blindness of understanding, which have followed as the consequences of sin. Such is the slowness and obscurity of our conceptions, such the feebleness and fallibility of our judgment, and such the weakness of our memory, that much labour is necessary to acquire a small degree of knowledge. Effort attends every acquisition, and doubts and uncertainties diminish the value of every possession; and the wiser men are, the more readily will they confess that all they know is but little in comparison of what remains to be known. But in heaven all*

these defects and obstacles will cease to exist. What then will be able to hinder the activity of the soul, or to cloud its perceptions? Its intellectual powers will then receive such an accession of strength and vigour, as will add quickness, facility, and pleasure to all their operations. There will be no dulness of apprehension, no difficulty of judging, and consequently no painful investigation of truth, no perplexed reasonings, no false conclusions. Our moral nature being perfectly restored to order by the eradication of every thing unholy, will leave the intellect to act in perfect freedom, while the subjects of thought will be presented in all their variety and vastness. How delightful the anticipation! Is it not certain that an understanding thus purified and extended,—continually occupied in discovering new objects,—always in a state to form just ideas,—always at the fountain of truth,—always receiving the direct unobstructed beams of the divine glory,—always capable of considering truths in connexion with their causes and effects, and in relation to God, and his works of creation, providence, and grace,—and which shall always make use of these truths and objects to raise itself to God, to admire him, to praise him, to adore him; is it not certain that an understanding, thus enlarged and occupied, must be a source of the most exalted joy. Observe the effect as to *love*. That is a great change which takes place on earth when a sinner is converted to God; for then the enmity of the carnal mind to God and the things of God is subdued; then the affections which had been placed solely on things base, sordid, and earthly, are changed and purified, and fixed on things above. By that change he is translated from a state of guilt and misery into a state of grace and happiness; but another transition is necessary to perfect his blessedness, he must be translated from a state of grace into a state of glory. In the former his sanctification is imperfect; his love is languid, it is in his heart but as a feeble flame, its happy

influence is impaired by infirmity and sin; but in heaven it will be perfect, free from any alloy. We shall love what we ought to love, and our love will be always delightful, always calculated to afford us new pleasure. O, how free shall it be, when it shall have neither distraction, nor conflicts, nor obstacles! O, how pure shall it be, when it shall no longer be mixed with any carnal motives! O, how extensive shall it be, when we shall love in proportion to our knowledge, and shall "know even as we are known!" Then shall we see God in all his excellence,—the supreme object and end, the only felicity of the soul; and the sight will excite and draw forth all its powers, and fill the utmost capacity and expansion of the spirit with pure and rapturous affection. Can we form a fuller conception of bliss than to be perfectly loved by the best and most blessed being, and perfectly to love him, thus reflecting in ourselves the glories of the divine image? Observe the effect as to *enjoyment*. The soul is capable here of a great number of pleasing sensations; and great is the happiness which we are made to enjoy when we taste that the Lord is gracious, and know the things that are freely given us of God. In communion with him the christian is often filled with all joy and peace in believing, and experiences pleasures which he would not exchange for all the pleasures of the world. But we may easily conceive that in heaven the soul may have an infinity of pleasures more agreeable, more lively, and less limited, than those of this life. And who can say how much a bountiful God, who shall no longer be prevented by sin and defect,—a God who shall take pleasure in making us as happy as our capacities will admit,—a God who shall act upon the ground of his love to Jesus Christ, his Son, and in reference to his infinite merit; who can say how far he can cause pleasures to spring up within us? Now he bestows upon his people the honour of being his sons, the graces and comforts of his Spirit, the pre-

cious earnest of his love, and the seal of their redemption; but, in eminency of degree, the emanations of his love, and the effects of his beneficence, are incomparably more glorious in heaven. Here the saints are adopted;—there crowned. There he opens all the bright treasures of his wisdom, the riches of his goodness, the beauties of his holiness, the glories of his power; and by the unrestrained manifestations of his presence, fills them with ineffable delight.

The *body* also shall be raised in perfection. The soul and the body are the essential parts of man, and however inferior it may be in its nature, yet the body is necessarily associated with the soul in all the exercises of piety here. Holy actions are originated by the wisdom and determination of the Spirit, but they are performed by the ministry of the flesh. Every grace expresses itself in visible actions by the body. In repentance, it weeps; in thanksgiving, the tongue utters accents of praise; in fulfilling the will of God, the feet run with swift obedience. All our labours, and all our victories, are achieved by the soul in conjunction with the body. Inasmuch then as he is served and glorified by both, God has determined that both shall again be united, and glorified together. They run the same race, and shall receive the same reward; they are engaged in the same conflict, and shall share the same triumph. When the crown of glory shall be conferred by the great Judge, both shall partake of the honour. No doubt, this will greatly contribute to our happiness. If, indeed, the body were to be raised up no better than when laid down, such a resurrection would scarcely be desirable. In our present state, our bodily frame is in itself imperfect; it is vitiated by disease, liable to frequent derangement, and easily overcome by fatigue; it is often an impediment to devotion, a source of pain and misery, and tinged with gloom and melancholy the fairest scenes of life. Hence, to lay down the body is looked upon by many as a deliverance; and, judg-

ing of the future by their feelings at the present, the prospect of re-assuming it excites but little eagerness of desire. But when raised, the body shall be fitted to become the habitation of a glorified and immortal mind, and prove to it a most useful and delightful companion throughout eternity. It will not be a prison, a burden, a hinderance ; but a help, and in the possession of this residence, the soul will become greater, holier, and happier. I will not here speak of difficulties, for difficulties there are none with infinite power. And with regard to the apparent impossibilities which an unsanctified and daring philosophy may have connected with the identity of the human body in the resurrection, we must leave all such speculations where we leave infidelity in general, and address the authors of them in the words of our Lord to the Sadducees, "ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." Certainly matter in all its forms is so arranged by God, who sees the end from the beginning, that when he gives the word to raise the human body there cannot possibly be any obstacle, for it is done by God who is able to do all things. We refer all to the power of God: the whole is a miracle. There are two ways by which the scriptures elevate our ideas of the resurrection body. The first is, to contrast it with the body we now have. "So is the resurrection of the the body. It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption." Firm, enduring, incapable of defilement, unassailable by distress, and proof against the undermining progress of years. "It is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory." No longer composed of bare elements, subsisting on gross supplies, or employed in low and degrading toils ; for we shall be made like unto the angels of God. "It is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power." No longer liable to fatigue and lassitude, requiring sleep and rest ; but ever healthy, vigorous, and strong, capable of serving God in his temple day and night. "It is sown a natural body ; it is raised a spiri-

tual body." A body suited to a spiritual world, where all is intellectual, and where no objects of sense debase or distract the mind. The second method is to hold forth the conformity it will bear to the glorified body of Jesus. "Who shall change our vile body, and fashion it like unto his glorious body." Observe the model. It is the body of Christ, not as born of Mary, not as he appeared among the Jews, but as it appeared after his ascension. We are not without some representations of the glory of the body of Christ. A glimpse of this glory was given, by way of anticipation, to the disciples in the transfiguration, when "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." In this glory he appeared to Saul, he shone "above the brightness of the sun," and struck him blind. In this glory he was seen by John, "his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength," and though he had been once familiar with him, and had leaned on his bosom, he "fell at his feet as dead." How glorious must be that body in which he now governs the world, in which he will judge the universe, in which we shall hold all our intercourse with deity! Yet a conformity to this glory is not a privilege too great for our hope. How animating the thought. How ought it to fortify our minds against the fear of death. Not only are our spirits secure, but our bodies likewise. There can be no ground of fear so long as you can say with the apostle, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

You may reckon upon the *most endeared society*. As a social being, man is dependent on the society with which he mingles for a very large share of his personal happiness. One of the greatest and most solid pleasures of life here, is that of a tender friendship, a united society, an agreeable connexion with the wise and good. But this is a delight as rare as it is sweet. And what a source of grief to us is the company of

the wicked. Even in our choicest connexions, how many draw-backs upon our happiness arise from imperfection, absence, separation, pain, sickness, and death. Hence some have been ready to envy the unrelated, unconnected individual, whose anxieties and griefs are all personal. But "it is not good that man should be alone" in any condition. It is better to follow the course of providence; to cherish the intimacies of life; to improve and sanctify them; to look forward to a state where all impediments to social happiness shall be removed; when we shall join the general "assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven; the spirits of just men made perfect, an innumerable company of angels, Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and God the judge of all." In the scriptures heaven is always represented as a social state; and how much is there in the prospect to excite joyous expectation! Do the tender feelings of nature, refined and strengthened by divine grace, excite in our breasts an ardent desire to be admitted again to the embrace of pious friends and relatives, whom we have lost on earth, and who are now for ever with the Lord? That desire will be gratified. That is, indeed, a transcendent vision

" Which paints the lost on earth, reviv'd in heaven ;"

and yet, not more transcendent than true. The inspired writer says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air ;

and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." Oh, what joyful congratulations will then be interchanged betwixt parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and friends, when they shall meet around the throne! What deep emotions swell the heart of a christian parent on earth, when he hears a beloved child, under the influence of spiritual concern, ask "what must I do to be saved?" or when, stepping into the glorious liberty of the children of God, he exclaims,

"My God is reconcil'd, his pardoning voice I hear:"

but what is this to the joy he will experience when he meets that child in glory? His former emotions were qualified by the thought of the temptations to which he was yet exposed, and the possibility that these promising appearances might after all be blighted; but the latter will be unalloyed by any restrictive circumstance whatsoever. Does language fail to describe the scene of domestic bliss which is exhibited when the sailor boy, after a long absence, and many exposures and sufferings, returns home, and is embraced by parents, sisters, and brothers, who rejoice over him as one who "was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found?" What then shall be the meeting of the same relatives in heaven,—when the mother receives her children to the skies from this degenerate earth, and the father hails his offspring from this land of death to the region of life and immortality? O, happy meeting! when they meet, no more to share each other's griefs, no more to mourn each other's woes, no more to grieve for each other's defects, but to share in each other's joys, to triumph in each other's happiness, to behold in each other an immortal loveliness; and when every bosom shall glow with unutterable bliss, and burn with seraphic love!

Now, when the pious mind dwells upon the character of

those eminent saints who have shone as burning luminaries in the moral hemisphere, and those whose faith and patience have been recorded in the sacred page for our instruction and edification, how often do his passions kindle with desire to see, and hear, and mingle with them. Such will be our exalted privilege at death. O, can it be a little thing, "to walk with the nations of the saved?" Can it be a little thing, to commune with "faithful Abraham;" to see "the end of the Lord" in Job; to listen to "the sweet singer of Israel;" to look on the transfigured face of Moses; to "hail the mother of our Lord," and learn from her what she "pondered in her heart;" to sympathize with the emotions of the "disciple whom Jesus loved;" to fall on Paul's neck, not weeping that "we shall see his face no more," but rejoicing that he has now "received us for ever;" to associate with all those "who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." Their number cannot be told; their happiness cannot be conceived; their honours cannot be described; they are all of one mind and of one heart. With endless modifications of character, and as endless a diversity of reward, no possible interruption can arise to their harmony. The concord is absolute. "The bond of perfection" excludes the most distant encroachment, or the most subtle insinuations of envy, suspicion, or distrust. The misconstructions of motive, the dissensions of opinion, the alienation of habit, which sever the righteous here, will be replaced by generous confidence, unerring sentiment, and inseparable union. They are knit to each other in indissoluble bonds of esteem and love, and all the rich treasures of knowledge and pleasure, which each one possesses, are cheerfully laid out to promote the growing entertainment and happiness of the whole. Angels, also, make up a part of the society to which we shall be admitted. "Those morning stars" that "sang together," "those sons

of God" who "shouted for joy" at the creation of the world,—those armies of the living God,—those glorious beings who never sinned, who excel in strength, who are proverbial for their wisdom, and who are our models in doing the will of God; a number that cannot be reckoned. Even now they feel a lively interest in our welfare. They rejoiced in our penitence,—they minister to us as the heirs of salvation,—they are messengers of mercy to convey the spirit of the departing Lazarus to Abraham's bosom; nor will they fail to congratulate us on our safe arrival at the celestial shore. How enriching and delightful must be their society, employed as they have been in observing the ways and works of God from the commencement of time, and excelling as they do in wisdom and benevolence.

But what constitutes the crowning point of heavenly bliss, is, that in the midst of this illustrious multitude, we shall see Jesus. Heaven is the place of his residence, and there every eye shall behold him. In his last prayer for his disciples, he said, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." And his glory they do behold, for they see him "face to face." "They stand before the throne of God," in his presence, at his "right hand." At present, the clouds and darkness are round about the throne; "we walk by faith, not by sight;" but then we shall behold what has heretofore been disclosed only in rare and imperfect vision to some of his inspired messengers; we shall see him as did Isaiah, "on his throne high and lifted up, and his train filling the temple." Then will he unveil his matchless beauties to the enraptured gaze of his redeemed people; then will he lay open the inexhaustible treasures of his grace for their enjoyment, and admit them to the most intimate and endearing communion with himself. Who that loves the Redeemer can contemplate the prospect of being admitted into his immediate presence, without the

deepest emotions of holy joy? Do we deem those highly privileged who were admitted to his society on earth, who heard his words, and saw his miracles, and enjoyed his friendship: but what was this contrasted with the enjoyment of his presence in heaven? Even here, while engaged in communion with him, how often has he made your earthly vessel to overflow with joy and consolation? how often in the closet, and in the sanctuary, have his manifestations so overwhelmed your spirit, that you have been led to cry out,

“ Oh! would he more of heaven bestow,
And let the vessel break!”

What, then, must heaven be, when you shall “ be for ever with the Lord?”

Reckon upon *the most glorious employment*. Man is an active being, and suitable employment for his active powers seems to be essential to his perfect happiness. In the present world, indolence is irreconcilable with piety, and it is equally incompatible with happiness.

“ A want of occupation is not rest,
A mind quite vacant is a mind distress'd.”

The state of Adam in paradise was neither one of idle contemplation, nor of mere quiescent enjoyment. He was “ placed in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it;” and the descriptions which are given us in scripture of the heavenly state all imply an active and vigorous exertion of the powers by which we shall then be distinguished. We know that angels are active beings;—they are employed sometimes around the throne,—sometimes in ministering to the heirs of salvation,—sometimes on missions to distant parts of God’s dominions; and from this activity their happiness in a great measure

arises; we are justified, then, in the conclusion, that saints who will shortly become their associates, and be placed in circumstances so nearly resembling their own, will be similarly employed. Without such employment some faculties of their nature would be unoccupied, some graces of their character would be unexercised, and some of their capacities of enjoyment ungratified. It is expressly stated that "they serve God day and night in his temple." But what are the employments of heaven? This is a subject on which it were vain to speculate. Perhaps it is best to take our most holy, exalted, and dignified exercises here, and to imagine them disconnected from all that is mean and degrading, all that is weak and restrictive, all that is painful and distressing, and to suppose them perpetuated without interruption, and with ever growing delight. In what does the saint of God find the most joyful and dignified employment for his powers here? In the worship of God,—in the contemplation of his glories,—in the study of his works of creation, providence, and grace,—in fulfilling his purposes,—in promoting his glory,—in aiding and relieving his servants,—in maintaining communion with them: but how many circumstances combine to interrupt and restrict these exercises, and to diminish the joy they are calculated to produce! the engrossment of worldly pursuits,—the weakness of our physical nature,—the conflicts we have to maintain,—the discouragements to which we are subject,—the feebleness of our mental capacities,—the limited sphere of our movements: but in heaven these will have no place; there will be an exemption from all those inconveniences which we now so sensibly feel and lament. Ah! who can conceive a thousandth part of the joy, the rapture, which shall then be experienced by the saint of God, when endowed with immortal vigour,—all his powers renewed in absolute perfection;—freed from darkness, prejudice, and error, from weakness and infirmity, his faculties shall all be exercised on the noblest and

loftiest subjects, and in a manner suited to their perfect nature; when he shall be able to prosecute his enquiries, and to render the services of his grateful affection without weariness, and without imperfection; and when every act will increase his knowledge, heighten his love, and enlarge his joy. Then you must reckon, also,

On the perpetuity of the whole. "What is wanting here?" said a flattering courtier to his prince, when riding in all the pomp and pride of a triumphal procession: "continuance," replied the moralizing emperor. All sublunary bliss is fleeting and transitory, but the happiness of heaven is everlasting. Were it not so, its worth would be materially diminished. In proportion to the value of any possession is our desire to perpetuate it, and our regret in the prospect of its loss. Whatever, therefore, might be the happiness of heaven, yet the thought that such happiness might end, would destroy its perfection, and inspire sad and melancholy forebodings. There is no ground, however, for such apprehension. There happiness is not less permanent than complete. There pleasures are for evermore. And the sacred writers would never have us lose sight of this. With all their representations of heavenly bliss, they are careful to associate the idea of its eternity. Is it treasure? it is a treasure which "neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal." Is it a building? it is "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Is it a crown? it is "a crown of glory, that fadeth not away." Is it a kingdom? it is "a kingdom that cannot be moved," "an everlasting kingdom." Is it life? it is "eternal life." As God hath of his infinite bounty prepared unutterable joys for his people in the world to come, so he has affixed no other term to the duration of these joys, than that of his own existence. He is himself eternal, and the life he gives them through Christ his Son shall never end; and every thing that shall render a life in

heaven desirable will possess the same undecaying character. They who possess the joys of the paradise above know that they are perpetual, nor does the most distant suspicion that they will be interdicted, or superseded, or terminated, ever glance upon their happy minds. The sun that lightens that world never goes down, nor is one ray of its glory ever eclipsed by an interposing cloud. The sentient nature of the saints will never decay, nor their moral nature become disordered, nor their intellectual vision grow dim, nor their society be reduced either by disease or death, nor their employment come to an end, but eternity is inscribed on them all. Before them stretches one eternal day of bliss. How stupendous the idea. Go forward in thought through countless myriads of ages ; imagine years to have passed away as numerous as the dew drops of the morning,—as the sands of which this earth is composed ; then look at the inhabitants of heaven ; their sun still shines resplendent, no cloud has darkened its glory ; the measure of their joy is still undiminished,—no transient pain,—no ruffling passion,—no disquieting fear,—no stain of sin,—no indication of danger has disturbed the sweet composure of their spirits, or rippled for a moment the smooth surface of their joy. Through periods so long, that compared with them time and all its ages is but the twinkling of an eye, their happiness has flowed without interruption, with a deepening and widening current ; nor do they mourn its departure, for an eternity is still before them ; they are still but commencing their bliss. O, enrapturing prospect ! O, happy end of life's short pilgrimage ! O, blessed and glorious abode ! Happy, happy they, who thus rest in the presence of their God ! their conflicts are all over ; their sorrows are all ended ; and joy unutterable is become their portion for ever. Christian mourner, contemplate the delightful scene ! What are all your sufferings here in comparison of the glory that shall be revealed ? they are light, insignificant, and mo-

mentary. Live, then, in the anticipation of this blessed termination of all your trials. What you may yet have to endure, God only knows ; but of this you are assured, he will know your soul in adversity ; he will hold you with his right hand. The space between you and the grave is not great. You are every hour drawing nearer to your heavenly home. The world is behind you ; heaven is before you. From behind you hear the groans of misery, and the cry of despair ; before you, from above, you will presently hear a voice saying, " come up hither." A most enrapturing scene will then burst forth upon your delighted eyes, and fill your astonished heart with ecstatic joy ; you will soon cease to mourn and weep, and commence an endless song of praise to " him who hath loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood." Farewell, then, for ever farewell, the tearful eye, the bleeding heart ! farewell, the tender anxious dread of separation ! farewell, the melancholy scenes of parting ! farewell, beloved friends' last weeping adieu ! Immortality, glory, peace, heaven, and eternity, will be for ever secured to you. It is true you have yet to die, and the summons of death falls with startling sound on the timid ear ; cold, and dark, and troubled, are the waters of this Jordan ; but fear not ; the Lord will either divide them for your passage, or he will help you to pass through them in safety. Lo ! the heavenly country, the holy city rises before you ! They mirror themselves in the stream ! The spires of the heavenly Jerusalem glitter in your view ! Already you feel the refreshing gales which blow from Canaan's shore, and catch occasionally in the breeze the distant melodies of its inhabitants ! With such a prospect before you, can you give place to fear or despondency ? Surely not. In the spirit of faith, and hope, and gratitude, look forward to the blessed results of a patient continuance in well doing ; so will you rise above every thing that is painful and gloomy in your present condition ; the spirit of holy joy and triumph

will take possession of your bosom; and even amidst scenes of sorrow, and pain, and bereavement, you shall yet joy in the God of your salvation, and it shall be a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Many, however, are in tribulation and yet have no such prospect. Their thoughts are broken off, even the purposes of their hearts, and their earthly schemes laid desolate; yet, they have nothing before them: yea, conscience tells them, this is only the beginning of sorrows, the short preface to a long roll, written within and without with mourning, lamentation, and woe. Reader, should you be in this unhappy state, the writer, before he lays down his pen, would fain, once more, give you warning from God. O, my fellow sinner, reflect, I beseech you, on your fearful condition! You are unhappy here, and you are hastening onward to an eternal perdition: in your sorrows you are now ready to think your burden too intolerable to be borne; how then will you endure the torments of hell? If the chastisements of God, when he deals with you in mercy, are so heavy, what must be the outpourings of his wrath? O, think of this. Believe me, all the evils you have ever beheld, or heard of, or conceived, were they collected together, and concentrated in your individual experience, would not furnish an adequate illustration of the future punishment which awaits the impenitent. And then eternity! eternity! Oh, to spend eternity in this anguish! Who can bear the thought of this? Flee, sinner, flee, from the wrath to come. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" O, pity yourself! it is not yet too late. The Saviour stands before you in all the combined forms of power and of pity. He is able, he is willing to save to the uttermost. Seek him while he may be found. Dare no longer to provoke the wrath of Almighty God. Flee, at the peril of your soul, flee! Flee from your sins, your lukewarmness, your unbelief; flee to Jesus, to the fountain opened in his side. Wait for no quali-

fications to recommend you to his gracious notice. He requires none. If Paul and Silas were to advise you, they would say, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Plead not as an objection, your unworthiness. This should only increase the earnestness of your application. Behold the number and the character of those who have obtained mercy. There is scarcely one class of sinners, or one class of crime which is not specifically mentioned in scripture as having been pardoned. Read his word; and hear him saying in the language of gracious encouragement, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Obey his voice; and commit yourself into his hands. Every thing urges you to this. You are urged to it by the commands of God,—by the blood of Christ,—by the strivings of the Spirit,—by the admonitions of providence,—by the invitations of the gospel,—by the entreaties of ministers,—by the tears of relatives,—by the uncertainty of the future,—by the difficulty of repentance,—by your present sufferings,—by the prospect of greater and never-ending woes; by all these are you urged to surrender yourself to the service of God, and by faith to commit yourself into the hands of your Redeemer. My earnest desire or you is, that you may now yield to the grace of religion; and that your hopes may now rise to its glory; nor can I wish you any thing either higher, or better, or happier in this world, than the service of the Lord Jesus, nor a more glorious reward for eternity than the crown of glory which he will bestow on all those who wait for his appearing. And that redeeming mercy should raise to such a crown the children of wrath shall be the wonder of angels, and of just men made perfect, for ever and ever. May the God of all grace raise you from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness! Amen.

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